



THE INDEPENDENT

Friday 28 November 1997 45p (IR50p) No 3,468

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TOKEN COLLECT

TODAY'S NEWS

Guinness report reveals 'cavalier' City

The Government's long-awaited report into the Guinness scandal of the mid-1980s, published yesterday, concluded that the whole affair displayed businessmen and financiers behaving with a "cynical disregard of laws and regulations, cavalier misuse of company money and a contempt for truth and common honesty". But Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has decided not to apply to disqualify any of those implicated; several have returned to lucrative and prominent positions in the City. Page 22

Minimum wage let out for young people

Low paid workers aged under 26 may not have the protection of the minimum wage legislation introduced by the Government yesterday. The published Bill allows for the exemption of young people - a move seen as a partial victory for Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio, who wanted the measure to be flexible. Employers could face fines of up to £5,000. Page 11

Spencer's divorce offer

Details of Lord Spencer's proposed divorce settlement with his wife emerged yesterday. He has offered her £300,000, a £244,000 house, more than £2,000 a month, and full maintenance for the children. English lawyers said they would regard that as too low for a man worth £100m; Lady Spencer is seeking £3.75m from him. Page 12

Easier listening Radio 3

Revamped schedules for Radio Three - a station heard by only 1.3 per cent of the listening audience at any one time - were announced yesterday to widespread intrigue and alarm. New presenters - who include Joan Bakewell, Peter Hobday, Richard Baker and David Mello - will run programmes which play shorter but complete pieces, enabling listeners to dip in and out of the station more easily. Page 4

Museum breaks rank

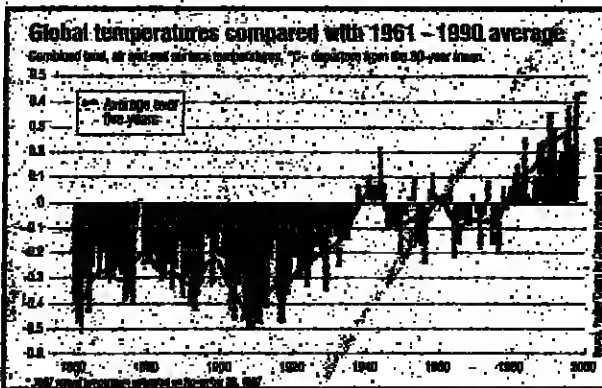
The hitherto united front among museums on admission charges appeared to fracture yesterday, when the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum said he could not countenance the British Museum being subsidised to avoid charges without seeking subsidy of his own to stop charging. Page 3



Rallying to the cause: Members of seven separate hunts gathering in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, yesterday to protest against attempts to ban their sport. *Hunting debate, page 7* Photograph: Neil Plumb

The heat is on, in the world's warmest year

British scientists warn that by 2050, 100 million more people could be facing extreme drought due to mankind altering the climate. And this year is set to be the world's warmest, according to a Met Office report released yesterday. *Nicholas Schoon and Colin Brown report on a grim forecast.*



With three days left before the UN Climate Treaty summit starts in Kyoto, Japan, the British Government stepped up the international pressure for cuts in greenhouse gas emissions with a grim report on the changes in store for the next century.

Tropical forests, already under pressure, will shrink in a warmer world and their ability to soak up the extra carbon dioxide humanity is putting in the atmosphere will be diminished - tending to accelerate the warming.

Huge sums will have to be spent on new coastal defences as sea levels gradually rise. If not, by 2080 about 200 million people will be seriously endangered by flooding. By then, the climate change will also increase the risks of starvation for 50 million people in the tropics, particularly in Africa.

The report uses the latest supercomputer simulations of climate change up to 2100 from the Met Office's Hadley Centre in

Bracknell, a world leader in this specialised and arcane science.

Then it turned out these predictions to Britain's leading university and government scientists in the fields of water resources, coastline dynamics, crop growing and plant ecology to find out what pressures the rainfall and temperature changes would bring to bear on a global population of about 10 billion people.

Thousands of copies of the report will be distributed among the delegates from 160 nations who begin gathering in Kyoto next Monday. Their task is to negotiate what action needs to be taken to slow down the change in climate caused by humanity's intervention in the atmosphere.

The Hadley Centre's best estimate for the average temperature rise over the next century of between 2.5 and 3C, if countries carry on burning more and more coal, oil and gas in a "business as usual" scenario.

By 2080, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will have doubled from today's level; this is the most important of the heat-trapping greenhouse gases which fossil fuel use, forest clearing, cement manufacture and farming are pouring into the air.

Overall, there will be 3 per cent more rainfall around the world by 2050 - but it will be unevenly distributed. Much of the tropics and subtropics will become substantially drier. Mexico, North Africa, southern Europe and India are all forecast to have less water available, although China and the US are predicted to have more.

The Met Office said that, with a month of 1997 still left to go, this year was almost certain to be the world's warmest in a global temperature record stretching back to 1860.

Partly this is due to this year's particularly powerful El Niño event, a warming of the

sea and air in the tropical east Pacific which occurs every few years and causes huge disruption and destruction.

But the five warmest years since global records began have all been in the 1990s. Overall, temperatures have risen 0.6C this century, and are expected to carry on rising - but more quickly.

Deputy Executive Director of Greenpeace UK, Chris Rose, said: "All the evidence points to the fact that climate change is already happening... the sky does indeed have a limit."

Yesterday, in Canberra, Australia, Britain's Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, pleaded with that country's government to change its stance on global warming.

Australia has taken the most extreme position of any developed country, saying it wants to be allowed to raise its greenhouse gas emissions by 13 per cent between 1990 and 2010.

The European Union, which Mr Prescott is representing in a world tour of last minute climate diplomacy, says the wealthy nations must commit to a 15 per cent cut over this period. The US, the biggest polluter in absolute and per capita terms, is holding out for a stabilisation of emissions at the 1990 level by 2010.

It seems increasingly likely that the notion of greenhouse gas emission quotas which can be traded between countries will feature in any final agreement at the Kyoto talks, which last 10 days.

Winnie may face fresh murder charges

Winnie Mandela ordered the murder of her personal doctor, Abu-Baker Asvat, and gave the killer the murder weapon, according to an official document submitted last night to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Now there are certain to be great pressures for the woman once known as the Mother of the Nation to be prosecuted for conspiracy to murder. *Fred Bridgland reports from Johannesburg.*

Cyril Zakele Mbatha, serving a life sentence for Dr Asvat's murder, said in his submission: "I killed Dr Asvat by shooting him with a 9mm gun. This was under instructions from Mrs Mandela and I genuinely believed that I would be benefiting the future political system of our country."

News of the confession by Mbatha, who is scheduled to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee tomorrow, is certain to cause a major furore when the Commission reconvenes today under the chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Mbatha said he was initially given a gun by his accomplice, Nicholas Thulani Dlamini, to assassinate Asvat on 27 January 1989. The gun jammed, so they were taken by car to Mrs Mandela's Soweto home. "This

was for the purpose of changing guns," said Mbatha. Dlamini and the driver waited outside. "Mrs Mandela said if we killed Dr Asvat we would be paid Rand20,000 [£4,000 in 1989]... and not only would we get money for the job, but we would be doing it for the cause of our country." Mbatha said Mrs Mandela ordered Katiza Cebekhulu - the so-called "missing witness" in the Winnie Mandela saga - to guide them to Asvat's surgery.

A prior appointment had been made with the doctor. Dlamini sat in the waiting-room. With him was Dr Asvat's receptionist, Albertina Sisulu, wife of ANC chief, Walter Sisulu.

"I went into Dr Asvat's rooms and I shot him twice in the chest," said Mbatha.

Dlamini panicked and tried to climb out of the window, but I shouted to Mrs Sisulu that if she did not open the security doors I would kill her. All of a sudden the doors opened and I ran out together with Dlamini."

The South African Police have been accused of covering up the full facts about the Asvat murder, which happened four weeks after the killing of Stompie Seipeke.

Evidence has emerged at the TRC hearings that Dr Asvat examined Stompie at Mrs Mandela's house after he had been severely beaten, on 29 December 1988, by her Mandela United Football Club. Asvat told Mrs Mandela that Stompie was so severely injured he would die unless taken to hospital. Stompie was stabbed to death later that night. *Witness's amnesia, page 8*

Will you give Mary a bed this Christmas?



At 16, Mary ran away from a life of abuse. Today she is homeless. Could you sleep easy on Christmas Eve knowing she was shivering in a bus shelter? You can help keep Mary, and thousands of vulnerable people like her, safe and warm over Christmas. With £25 from you, Crisis can provide a warm bed, hot meals, clean clothes and someone to talk to at one of our shelters.

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CROSSWORDS Page 32 and the Eye, page 29
WEATHER The Eye, page 30
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COLUMN ONE

Jesus may have been a chartered surveyor

Over the centuries biblical scholars have labelled Jesus Christ many things, but never before has anyone suggested he was a chartered surveyor.

Far from being a humble carpenter, the founder of Christianity was a cultured, middle-class businessman, according to a Jesuit historian. De-hunking the traditional image which has been lodged in the public's imagination for almost 2,000 years, he paints a picture of a *bon vivant* who spoke three languages, enjoyed the theatre and had his own firm of builders and surveyors.

The disciples were also middle-class, he claims. James and John were not poor fishermen but owners of a fishing co-operative with large boats capable of carrying up to a dozen fishermen and a ton of fish.

Fr Giovanni Magnani, a lecturer in Christology at the Vatican's Gregorian University, in Rome, bases his claims on new findings on the links between Judaism and Hellenism, and on updated interpretations by ac-



Jesus as depicted by da Vinci in *Christ among the Doctors*

knowledgeable experts of Hebrew texts on the society and culture of Galilee.

In his new book, *Jesus and Master*, published by Cittadella in Assisi, Fr Magnani suggests that the scarcity of trees in Galilee meant that joinery would not have been a viable career choice. He backs up his thesis by pointing to an erroneous translation of a word from the New Testament. The Greek word *'tekton'*, used in Matthew's gospel to describe St Joseph, did not mean carpenter, but rather was one level below an *'architekton'*, or civil engineer, thus making Jesus a member of Galilee's prosperous class of burghers.

Fr Magnani, a philosopher and historian who founded the Gregorian University's Institute of Religious Science, goes on to say that besides his mother-tongue, Aramaic, Jesus could also write and translate Hebrew, the language of the Holy Scriptures, and could probably speak fluent Greek.

The discovery of a large semi-circular theatre in Sefforis, a Greek town with a population of 30,000 built near Nazareth between 2BC and AD20, has allowed experts to re-evaluate the impact of Greek culture on the local civilisation. It is possible that besides taking part in the construction of the town himself, Jesus may have visited the Greek theatre to see a show. "There is a whole vocabulary used by Jesus which was taken from the world of business, of banking, of the average and significantly powerful, which has to be re-examined in greater depth."

Dr James Carleton Paget, a New Testament scholar at Peterhouse College, in Cambridge, was circumspect about whether it was possible to pin so much on the translation of *'tekton'*. However, he emphasised that he had not read Fr Magnani's book and would keep an open mind. He said he had always suspected that Jesus was a "louché socialist, someone who spent most of his time in Hampstead".

The reference in Matthew's gospel to Jesus as "a glutton and a winebibber" and "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" suggested as much, he said. And the account of the marriage feast at Cana, where they ran out of wine, hints that "Jesus was better connected than we thought".

A spokeswoman for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors was tickled by the idea of Jesus as their forefather. Describing the profession, with no pun intended, she said: "It's quite a broad church, if you know what I mean."

— Clare Garner

PEOPLE



Sqn Ldr Tucker and Dijana Dudokovic. Sexual side of their relationship was 'a bit of a disaster'

RAF officer tells of affair with Serb interpreter

A senior RAF officer yesterday took the witness stand to deny murdering his wife after becoming infatuated with a Serbian interpreter he met while on UN duties in Bosnia.

Squadron leader Nicholas Tucker, 46, told Northwick Crown Court that he found 21-year-old Dijana Dudokovic "very flirtatious, fascinating to be with, very vivacious and a good interpreter". But he admitted the sexual side of their relationship had been a "bit of a disaster".

Sqn Ldr Tucker admitted that he had a brief affair with Ms Dudokovic, but denied murdering his 52-year-old wife, Carol.

He told the jury how he had taken Ms Dudokovic, 21, whom he had met while on UN peacekeeping duties in Bosnia, to the south coast and the New Forest when she visited England in June 1995. But the two occasions on which they had tried to make love ended in failure and frustration.

Sqn Ldr Tucker added: "To put it bluntly I couldn't back it. After that, it was the time of the month for her. She had a period. I did not have sexual intercourse with her on any other occasion."

The prosecution alleges that Sqn Ldr Tucker, of Honington, Suffolk, murdered his wife by staging an accident at the river Lark near their home on 21 July 1995.

It is claimed that he had become infatuated with Ms Dudokovic.

Sqn Ldr Tucker described to the court events leading up to the fatal incident. He and his wife had gone out for dinner to the Red Lion pub in Icklingham and were on their way home when he missed a turning. "We were chatting, Carol shouted something to me to the effect 'mind the deer', she saw them before me momentarily. I would say I was doing more than 30mph. My recollections are she grabbed the steering wheel. I say that because the movement to the left was more than me steering. At that point I saw two animals on the road, my immediate thoughts were they were dogs, perhaps about the size of a Labrador."

Sqn Ldr Tucker said he has "three pictures in his memory" for what happened next. Firstly, he recalls the animals and then "a reflection with the headlights shining off some weeds. And the last one is water cascading down the window. The next thing I can remember is some white lights and someone talking to me. I think it was in the ambulance."

After the crash Squadron Leader Tucker said he suffered bruises, aches and pains and discovered he had grazed his forehead. He said: "My concern was obviously to know how Carol had died."

The case continues.

— Kim Sengupta

Proms manager moves to Royal Opera House

Judy Grabame, marketing manager of The Proms, has been appointed director of external relations at the Royal Opera House.

She replaces Keith Cooper, who achieved brief national fame in the television documentary series *The House*, but has now been moved internally to take charge of sales and broadcasting.

Before joining the BBC Ms Grabame was in charge of marketing at the London Philharmonic Orchestra and subsequently The Philharmonia.

The Royal Opera House is

currently the subject of a House of Commons select committee inquiry and a separate committee set up by Culture Secretary Chris Smith to investigate options including the Royal Opera, Royal Ballet and English National Opera sharing Covent Garden. It has also come close to liquidation with mounting debts this year.

Ms Grabame, who takes up her appointment in January, will be responsible for presenting the House's public image and liaising with the Government and the media. Her role will encompass external relations for the Royal Opera, Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera House. She said "last night" "This must be one of the most challenging jobs in the arts."

The opera house will be thrust into the spotlight again next Wednesday when the select committee issues its report. It is expected to be highly critical of arrangements during the two-year closure of Covent Garden. Opera and ballet companies have had to perform in several different venues, and ticket sales have been low.

— David Lister, Arts News Editor

Channel 4 urged to expand ethnic programming

Comedians Lenny Henry and Michael Palin and Booker-winning novelist Ben Okri have joined a campaign to force Channel 4 to broadcast three hours of ethnic minority programming during peak time each week.

The campaign - which is being led by Baroness Amos, former head of the Equal Opportunities Commission - is trying to take advantage of an review of Channel 4's licence that is under way. The Independent Television Commission is already proposing to make Channel 4 show fewer repeats and more

UK-produced programmes, and now the Channel 4 Licence Campaign is looking for a stronger commitment to ethnic minority programmes in peak time.

"We need to create a warm haven of diversity on Channel 4," said Ben Okri, author of *The Famished Road*. "Three hours of peak time programming, used wisely, can only be a force for good, for openness and for friendship amongst all people in Britain."

Other supporters of the campaign include Lord Desai and the broadcaster Trevor Philips.

— Paul McCann, Media Correspondent

UPDATE

JUSTICE

Hitting criminals where it hurts

Suspected crime barons should be made to account to the courts for their wealth, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary said yesterday.

It said new laws, similar to those used in the United States to combat the mafia, were needed to fight the increasing sophistication of organised crime in Britain.

Courts should be empowered to demand from suspected criminals an explanation for their wealth if they had no legitimate means of income. If a suspect could not prove that assets were lawfully obtained, the courts should have the power to seize them. HMIC said in a major report on criminal intelligence work.

"The most ruthless, organised criminals rarely put themselves in personal danger of arrest or charge," the report said. "They establish criminal networks which distance their involvement and legitimate 'front' businesses to launder their illicit profits."

"They have structures which include couriers, 'safe houses', quarter-masters and legal support on retainer."

"In their own fashion they are 'businessmen' and are as far removed from the nuttoid stereotype of the villain in popular fiction as Dixon of Dock Green is from the present reality of policing."

The report also called for greater investigation of the assets of major criminals who were convicted, with a view to seizing the proceeds of crime. "Limited investigative resources mean that inquiries are confined to obtaining evidence to convict offenders and are insufficient to pursue asset tracing beyond this point," it said.

Some large scale inquiries could be contracted out to forensic accountants and auditors, it added.



HEALTH

Malaria drug could be restricted

Lariam, the anti-malarial drug that has been linked with unpleasant side-effects, "may not be useful for routine prophylaxis (prevention)", according to a review of research in the *British Medical Journal*. Although it has been shown to be highly effective in preventing malaria in areas of high drug resistance, many people stop taking it because of side-effects such as insomnia and fatigue, nightmares and depression - limiting its effectiveness. The researchers say Lariam may not be appropriate for package holidaymakers but "may be useful for groups travelling to regions with a high risk of resistant malaria and limited access to effective medical care".

— Jeremy Laurance, Health Editor

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councils spending £7m on evictions

Councils in Britain are spending up to £7m a year on evicting travellers, according to new research.

Legal costs for each individual eviction can be as high as £10,000, according to a report on the research, the first of its kind, which has been carried out by the Travellers Research Centre at Cardiff Law School.

A report on the work says that figures are likely to be an underestimate because the councils it looked at had not taken into account all the costs incurred. Nor do the estimates include the costs of police activities. The report points out that at £7m a year, the eviction costs are higher than the cost of providing a network of sites for travellers across the country.

— Roger Dobson

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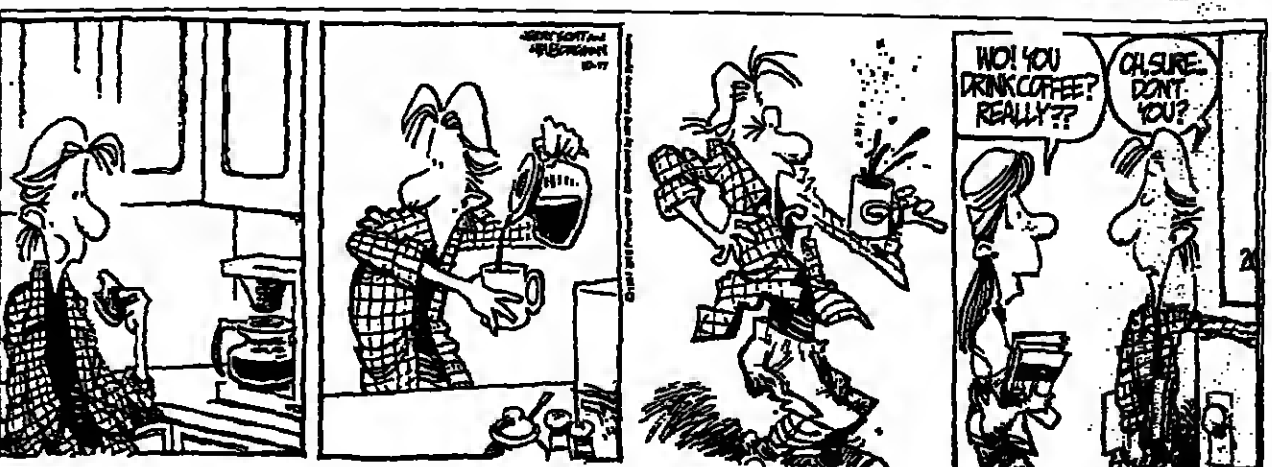
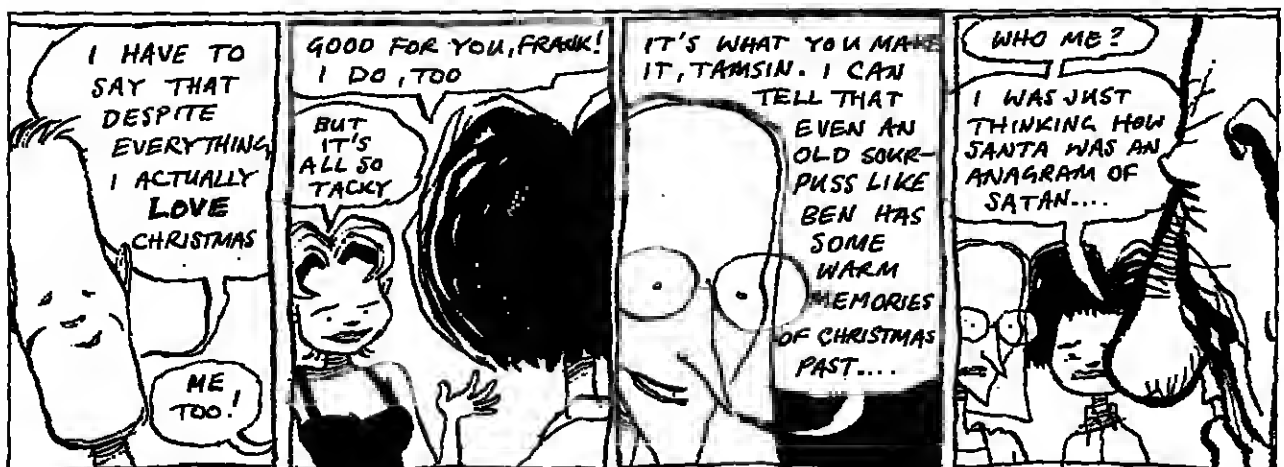
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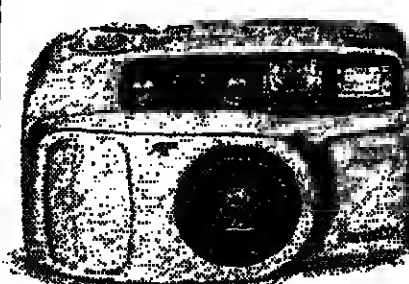
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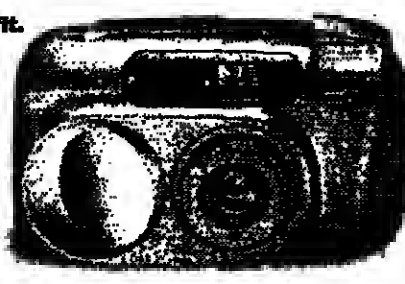


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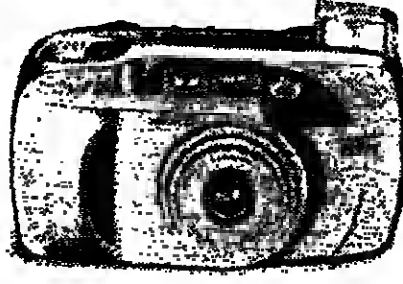
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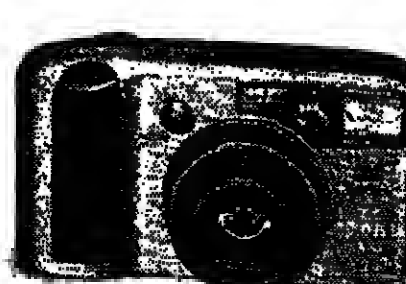
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IN TOMORROW'S 5 SECTION INDEPENDENT

Christmas shopping made easy
THE MAGAZINE



Top books of the year from Homer Simpson to Che Guevara
THE MAGAZINE



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TIME OFF

Our cat beats the experts... again
YOUR MONEY

Museums fall out in crisis over charging

The united front by national museums over free admissions has been broken. The director of the Victoria and Albert Museum tells our arts news editor, David Lister, that he will not tolerate financial help being given to some museums and not others.

In a strong challenge to the Government, Alan Borg said yesterday that if the Government found money for the British Museum to stop it charging, the V&A's trustees would consider scrapping their charges and demand a similar "hand-out." Until now the campaign to maintain free admissions among the national museums and galleries that do not charge — the British Museum, Tate, National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery — has been united.

But the intervention of Dr Borg, the V&A director, shows the resentment that has been building up among national museums and galleries which have felt obliged to impose admission charges in the face of declining grants. Whitehall sources have hinted that though the Government might next loosen its commitment to free admission to all national museums, it is considering an eleventh-hour increase in the grant for the British Museum to prevent it charging for the first time in its 230-year history.

Dr Borg said: "If the British Museum does receive a special sum to prevent it charging, there would be an immediate challenge from charging museums. The temptation for our trustees will be to say 'thank you very much, we'll take off our charges now.' That's an argument that will be had if the British Museum gets a hand-out. The Government could well see the British Museum as

the last bastion which must be safeguarded. But if the do something for the British Museum they have to do something for the rest of us."

This was attacked last night by Charles Smaugre-Smith, director of the National Portrait Gallery: "Everyone in the museum community as a whole must support the British Museum", he said, in achieving an end to its financial problems and safeguarding free admission.

Dr Borg said: "... The Government appears to have shifted from 'let's keep museums free' to 'let's keep museums that are still free, free.' That is unfair, and a distortion. We would all like to be free, but those of us who made the decision to charge early on to stop standards deteriorating should not be penalised. Charging was the lesser of two evils."

He also condemned as "rubbish" the argument by directors, including Neil MacGregor, the National Gallery head, that people are more likely to drop in to museums and galleries regularly when admission is free.

Dr Borg said: "The argument that you could no longer drop in for a few minutes is rubbish. The V&A has an annual season ticket for £15, and entry is free after 4.30 in the afternoon every day."

A different aspect to the debate is raised today by Sir Denis Mahon, who recently bequeathed a number of masterpieces to the National Gallery and other institutions on condition they do not bring in admission charges.

He has said he will withdraw his pictures if the institutions charge. In a letter to *The Independent*, he says: "... I am all in favour of genuine partnership between the private sector and the state for the benefit of the public. But if ... the state falls short of its evident duty I shall feel most sadly driven to reconsider my own possible involvement."

Letters, page 20

Stars turn out to mourn Hutchence in Sydney



Michael Hutchence's coffin, draped with 500 irises and a single tiger-lily, at the funeral yesterday in Sydney

Photograph: Rex Photos

The funeral of the singer Michael Hutchence took place yesterday in Australia, watched by millions of viewers who saw it broadcast live. The coffin was draped with 500 irises and a single tiger-lily, representing the singer's 16-month-old daughter, Heavenly Hiram Tiger Lily, who was cradled by her mother, Paula Yates.

Fans gathered outside Sydney's St Andrew's Cathedral to pay respects. One was removed from the church by police after reportedly trying to jump from a balcony in an apparent suicide attempt. Mourners included Kylie Minogue, Tom Jones, Diana Ross and Nick Cave, who sang the song "Into my arms" as part of the service.

Ms Yates did not wear the wedding dress she had hoped to don in January for her marriage to Hutchence and which she had said she would dye black for the funeral. Instead she wore a sleeveless, knee-length white floral-patterned black dress.

The decision to broadcast the service live was criticised by members of Hutchence's band, INXS, who said it would not have been what he would have wanted. He was found hanged in Sydney on Saturday in his suite at a hotel. He had arrived in Australia three days earlier for the start of INXS's 20th-anniversary tour.

Ian Burrell

Woman to be sued for libel by jailed rapist

A convicted rapist won the right to sue a woman for libel over a letter she wrote to police, which, he claims, cost him the chance of parole.

Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, reports on an extraordinary case.

Bank clerk Lynne Griffiths wrote to police complaining about constant "harassment" from rapist David Daniels, who was serving a life sentence. She said the numerous letters and telephone calls from the pris-

oner, who was at Gartree prison, were affecting the health of her family.

That letter helped keep Daniels behind bars, persuading prison authorities and doctors that his claims of an emotional relationship with Mrs Griffiths — who was not the rape victim — were invented. The Parole Board panel refused to release him.

Now, as a result of her complaint, Mrs Griffiths is being forced to defend an expensive libel action, and already faces costs running into tens of thousands of pounds after she failed yesterday to get his action stopped. Legal aid is not avail-

able and both parties are having to fund their own costs.

Mrs Griffiths' solicitor, Ann Morgan, said her client was "devastated and bewildered" by yesterday's ruling. She now had to face a full trial, seeing Daniels in court and incurring more expense. "We are determined to fight on," said Ms Morgan. "The alternative is unthinkable — namely to lie by admitting a relationship with the plaintiff which is a figment of his imagination."

Although Daniels has been convicted of no offence against Mrs Griffiths, one concern is that the case could dissuade victims from approaching author-

ities in the future if they are worried about the release of their attacker. Probation officers are obliged to seek the views of the victim before preparing parole reports.

The Court of Appeal, overturning an earlier judgement, ruled that Daniels' action was not an abuse of process and designed solely to harass Mrs Griffiths.

At the hearing, Cherie Booth QC, for Daniels, said her client claimed Mrs Griffiths' letter to South Wales police was libellous and he should have the chance to sue her and cross-examine her in court. Ms Booth asked that the truth of his

claims could be tested and "convince the prison authorities he is not mad".

"He has always maintained there was no physical relationship but there was a strong affection between them which she could not acknowledge."

Sir Brian Neill, giving judgement alongside Lord Justice Hirst and Lord Justice Swinton Thomas, said Daniels maintained that the authorities treat him as though he had made up a "completely fictitious account" of the relationship.

"Unless he can establish the true position by means of these proceedings, he has no prospect of correcting this misconception

and therefore no realistic prospect of obtaining parole."

He said Daniels' action faced "formidable difficulties", but the defendant had not shown it was bound to fail.

Mrs Griffiths has said that Daniels, who was convicted in 1983, had never been anything more than the man who served her while he was employed at a local newsagents in Swansea.

She wrote to police saying she feared he would attack her if he was released, and in June, 1994 the parole board turned down his application after he had served 11 years of his sentence, saying his feelings for Mrs Griffiths were "pathological".

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EXPORT**

**LA PETITE BIÈRE
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Disenchanted: Alan Horner leaving the day shift at Rossington Colliery, South Yorkshire, where he has spent nearly 25 years Photograph: Tom Pilon

'King Coal' attacked in Commons motion

A strong personal attack was made on Richard Budge, chairman of RJB Mining, in two Commons motions last night. Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, reports on a dramatic threat to 'King Coal'.

A fully-fledged judicial tribunal of inquiry should be set up to report on the Tory privatisation of the coal industry, and the transfer of pits to RJB Mining at the end of 1994, Labour MPs led by Robert Marshall-Andrews, QC, urged the Government last night.

It was proposed that the tribunal should be asked to investigate the background of RJB directors - "in particular Richard Budge, in the light of the report by Coopers and Lybrand, receivers for AF Budge, to the DTI in 1994, that Richard Budge was unfit to be concerned in the management of a company."

With Tony Blair being pressed by Cabinet colleagues to intervene on behalf of thousands of miners currently facing another Christmas under the threat of redundancy, the backbench attack on Mr Budge is expected to gather support and momentum.

One of two motions tabled last night said RJB Mining and/or Mr Budge had made a profit of £200m out of the mines.

It then repeated a suggestion made in confidential government documents, that RJB Mining had been unable to reach agreement with the electricity generators on five-year supply contracts - unlike other coal producers.

The motion noted that RJB Mining was seeking a government subsidy of £30m while, at the same time, it had found £50m to make a bid for a 24 per cent stake in the Australian coal industry - a bid that had been vetoed by the Australian government.

Ministers were also urged in the motion "to reject further applications from RJB Mining or its associates or agents for licences or permissions for open-cast coal mining, and to take whatever steps may be necessary to safeguard the jobs of 9,000 miners presently working for RJB Mining and/or Richard Budge."

It concluded by condemning the last Tory government for putting those jobs directly at risk.

As for the tribunal of inquiry - a judicial investigation with powers to compel the delivery of evidence, under oath - one Marshall-Andrews motion says its terms of reference should include:

"Whether the sale of undertakings in the industry to Richard Budge and/or RJB Mining was in accordance with good business practice; whether RJB Mining has carried out its business in accordance with good business practice and law; whether proper undertakings were sought from, or given by, RJB Mining, by or to the last administration, in relation to closures and redundancies within the industry."

The terms of the motion are clearly fuelled by an intense Labour anger over RJB's actions over recent months - and the threats it had made that the jobs of at least 5,000 of its 9,000 remaining deep-pit miners are in jeopardy.

Of the country's 25 remaining principal collieries, 18 are currently owned by RJB Mining - and the threat from the company is real.

Another Commons motion, put down on Tuesday, condemns the imminent closure by RJB Mining of Asfordby mine in Leicestershire.

Labour's new intake confronted by a gritty old problem

With the threat of closure hanging over half the coal industry, new Labour is facing an old Labour problem. Barrie Clement, Labour Editor, visits Rossington Colliery, in South Yorkshire.

Two women's wear factories and some light industry in Rossington would be unable to cope with 330 redundant pitmen from the local colliery.

Many of the miners instinctively feel that the Government is in the process of betraying them. "They all said

they had done everything possible to make the colliery profitable. "These men were hand-picked, you won't get better. We have cut ourselves to the bone and turned the industry upside down. We just want a fair crack of the whip. I can't believe the way a Labour government is treating us. They seem to think because it is a private company, we are out of their hair."

Caroline Flint concedes that she has no detailed knowledge of coalmining and refers technical questions to her colleague Kevin Barron, MP for Rother Valley, who has extensive experience in the industry.

She points out that her constituency has a wide range of industries of which the single colliery is a part. She argues that many of the problems stem from the Tory legacy, but says that an all-party group of MPs were doing their best to ensure there was a continuing demand for coal.

She said that the MPs were attempting to put pressure on the Government to develop a balanced energy policy with coal playing a strong part, as well as gas. Ministers were being prevailed upon to reinvestigate their campaign against subsidies to the industry in Germany and Spain. In the short-term - closures could begin before Christmas - she believed that there was scope for persuading power generators to use more coal.

If the initiative by Ms Flint and her colleagues is unsuccessful, Rossington, an area of high unemployment, will become an area of even higher unemployment.



Flint, Don Valley MP: Campaigning for more coal use

Caroline Flint, one of the new Blairite parliamentary intake, was felt to be a touch out of place when she visited a colliery in her Yorkshire constituency. "We didn't expect her to know everything about mining technology, but she didn't have a clue. She expected us to be using picks and shovels. I believe she was not selected by people in this area. She was imposed on us," said Alan Horner, 61, a Labour supporter and a face-worker who has spent nearly 25 years at Rossington Colliery, near Doncaster.

Ms Flint, a telegenic former local government officer from London, is among a group of new Labour MPs confronted with an old Labour problem.

Rossington is one of the collieries owned by RJB Mining in imminent danger of closure as power-stations increasingly rely on gas. The pit's village was built largely on coal and there would be little else for men to do if the mine closed.

One 39-year-old underground worker reckoned that the only major enterprise now taking on labour was a chicken-gutting factory in Scunthorpe 20

a lot in opposition about a balanced energy policy, now they are hiding their voices in their beards - I'm talking about Robin Cook," Mr Horner said. According to some industry observers - and despite significant reserves - Rossington could be a serious candidate for closure. British Coal closed the pit in 1993, but it returned to production in 1994 when RJB Mining leased it from the state and spent more than £17m on new machinery.

Keo Ashton, a shift manager who has worked for 33 years at the pit, said Rossington min-

Blair reveals request to 'bail out' industry

Tony Blair told a private meeting of Labour's national executive committee on Wednesday that he had been asked to save the coal industry.

Replying to a point made by Dennis Skooper about lone-parents child benefit, the Prime Minister is reported to have said with some exasperation: "All these demands. Now I have been asked to bail out the coal industry."

In public, as John Battle, the beleaguered energy minister, told the Commons on Wednesday morning, there is very little the Government can do in the face of the intransigence of Richard Budge, chairman of RJB Mining. Behind the scenes,

however, it is known that John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, and other colleagues are fighting a desperate rearguard action to help save miners' jobs.

The dilemma faced by ministers was underlined during question time in the Lords yesterday. Lord Ezra, a former National Coal Board chairman, urged action in the face of "persistent reports that up to eight of the remaining 24 deep mines in this country [are] likely to be closed in the next few months, leading to 5,000 redundancies".

Lord Clinton-Davis, a trade and industry minister, said that, since coal privatisation, the scope for Government inter-

vention was very limited indeed. He said that Mr Battle had already challenged unfair subsidies in Europe, reviewed coal prices, challenged gas contracts and ensured unfairly-supported French nuclear power did not have an unfair advantage.

"I am aware of the difficulties facing the industry," Lord Clinton-Davis said, "but I have to say, the main company concerned is, of course, the one that has to sort out these problems".

One alternative option raised by Mr Skinner in the Commons last week was for the industry to be renationalised. But there are few Labour MPs who believe that is possible.

— Anthony Bevis

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now open 7 days a week
now open 7 days a week
now open 7 days a week
now open 7 days a week
now open 6 days a week, closed Sundays
now open 7 days a week
open 7 days a week from Monday 1st December
open 7 days a week from Monday 1st December
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open 7 days a week from Monday 1st December

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Monday to Friday 8pm
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7/HUNTING

Stag ban is lifted but Whitehall fights over bones of a Bill

The Government will raise hopes of a ban on foxhunting being imposed before the next election, even if the private member's Bill in the Commons today is eventually killed. But Colin Brown, Chief Political Correspondent, says hunt supporters were given a boost yesterday by the Forestry Commission.

On the eve of today's Commons vote on a bill to ban hunting with hounds, hunt supporters claimed a victory after a tactical retreat by the Forestry Commission to lift a ban on stag hunting by the Quantock Hunt on its land for the rest of this season.

The Commission's decision came after farmers shot 36 stags in protest at the ban on the Quantock Hunt and assembled them for a photograph of the mass slaughter, which appeared on the front page of *The Independent* on Tuesday. "This gives us a breathing space to fight for the ban to be lifted next season," said a hunt supporter.

But the Forestry Commission yesterday said it would not allow any hunting of deer on its land anywhere else, and that the Quantock Hunt would not be allowed a licence next season. The hunt, in Somerset, is only being given extra time to allow alternative ways of controlling deer numbers to be organised.

Campaigners for a ban on all hunting with hounds will be in full cry today in the vote on hunting. They are expecting a massive majority at around 3.30pm with most Labour MPs

staying in Westminster to vote for the Bill, instead of going off to their constituencies for the weekend.

Michael Heseltine, the former deputy prime minister, will lead the charge against the Bill, and its opponents are confident of strangling the Bill in Parliamentary barbed wire during its committee stage. It will only take a handful of committed "saboteurs" to kill the Bill in later stages because of the lack of time.

But George Howarth, the Home Office minister, will give a clear signal that the Government is prepared to give the supporters of a ban a second chance, by allowing a forthcoming law and order Bill to be amended to include a ban on foxhunting, if the private member's Bill by Labour MP Michael Foster fails. That would ensure a ban had time to reach the Statute Book before the election. "The Government's line is that if the private member's Bill fails to complete its passage, it would be open to members to move amendments should a suitable vehicle occur in future sessions of Parliament," said a Whitehall source.

Ministers are keen to avoid further charges against Tony Blair for an alleged breach of faith over Labour's commitment to ensure a free vote on banning foxhunting.

Supporters of the Bill have put on unofficial whips for each region to ensure the highest possible turnout by Labour MPs to vote for the Bill's second reading. One of the unofficial whips told *The Independent* last night: "There is going to be a massive turnout. We are expecting a full house and a big majority in favour of the Bill."

Rallies and polls cheer both sides

Supporters and opponents of Michael Foster's Bill to ban fox hunting were last night bracing themselves for the climax of months of hard-fought campaigning.

Representatives from both camps - the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals and the Countryside Alliance - spent the last night before the crucial Commons debate holding 24-hour vigils in Westminster. Both sides were buoyed by the results of various polls, phone-ins and surveys which have surfaced in the past few days.

The anti-hunting lobby trumpeted the results of a new Mori poll showing that 54 per cent of adults in Henley-on-Thames wanted their local MP Michael Heseltine, to support Mr Foster's Bill. Sixty-four per cent of the 500 adults surveyed said they did not believe that fox hunting was an important part of the British way of life and 76 per cent thought hunters should take part in drag hunting.

Meanwhile, the pro-hunting lobby was celebrating the volume of callers who had expressed their opposition to the Bill after a live television debate on hunting earlier this week. Of the 1 million people who phoned ITV, 55 per cent voted in favour of a ban and 45 per cent against.

Sam Butler, who helped organise last July's Countryside Rally in Hyde Park, said: "That is a very, very significant mi-

nority. After Mr Foster has been on the road for three months with a campaign bus and the IFOR, RSPCA and League Against Cruel Sports have spent significant amounts of money - reported to be £5m, but now denied - the swing from a bleak 73 per cent in favour of a ban to 55 per cent is an indication of country feeling and a very significant one."

Earlier, more than 3,000 countryside campaigners joined 500 horses and riders at a rally at a disused aerodrome near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. They heard speeches, including one from local Tory MP and close aide of William Hague, Alan Duncan, and watched a parade of local hunts.

Rad Thomas, joint master of the Quorn Hunt, urged the public to think carefully about the issues. "People have turned out in strength today because they are desperately worried that this Bill is attempting to make us criminals," he said. "They know in their heart of hearts that the loser, if the Bill becomes law, will be the fox and the countryside and a way of life."

Roderick Duncan, of the Union of Country Sports Workers, said many country people feared for their livelihoods if the Bill becomes law. "A lot of people are going to lose their jobs and many also live in tied accommodation so they could lose their homes as well."

— Clare Garner



Canine protest: Foxhounds outside the House of Commons yesterday, as part of a demonstration against a private member's Bill to ban hunting with hounds. Photograph: Nicola Kurz.

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Hun Sen's foe returns home

Cambodia's former finance minister Sam Rainsy, who along with the deposed Prince Norodom Ranariddh heads the country's opposition, returned home yesterday, calling for peace and compromise.

Sam Rainsy left Cambodia several weeks before the powerful Second Prime Minister Hun Sen toppled his former coalition partner Ranariddh in early July. He was mobbed by supporters when he arrived at Phnom Penh airport. Sam Rainsy is the most prominent opposition politician to return since Hun Sen's takeover.

— Reuters, Phnom Penh

N Korea lured to peace talks

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said the main aim of Washington talks between North Korea and the United States were to get the North to attend four-party peace talks in Geneva.

The US State Department said on Wednesday that talks between North Korean and American officials "were held in a businesslike manner". North and South Korea, the United States and China last week agreed to begin peace talks on 9 December.

— Reuters, Seoul

Amnesia strikes witnesses at Winnie death hearings

Archbishop Tutu has taken a tough line with some witnesses at the Johannesburg hearings into Winnie Mandela's alleged atrocities. But Mory Braid says he failed yesterday to press top ANC officials in the same way to reveal all they know.

The archbishop rebuked a lawyer at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings for pressing Nhato Motlana, Mrs Mandela's former doctor and now one of South Africa's leading businessmen, about his poor memory of the 1989 kidnapping of the teenage activist Stompie Seipei Moekele and three other youths.

Dr Motlana, called in by a desperate community to persuade Mrs Mandela to release the youths, said he could not remember the conversation he later had with her.

Although there had been panic about the youngsters' safety, he claimed he had not asked to see them.

Neither did he remember them having any injuries when the three youths - minus Stompie, who was later found with his throat slit - were finally handed over to him after days of beatings.

Tony Richard, the lawyer representing Gerry Richardson, the coach of the Mandela United Football Club, who was jailed for Stompie's murder, requested it be recorded that a senior ANC MP, Aubrey Mokoena, was "an evasive and obstructive



Mokoena: ANC MP was called an 'evasive and obstructive witness'

witness". Mr Mokoena was a former member of the Mandela Crisis Committee, which had tried to negotiate the release of the youths.

There were sniggers in the hall when Mr Mokoena suggested that Mrs Mandela might not have been aware of the criminal behaviour of the football club, which had terrorised Soweto. "She was overcome by altruism," he said. "She couldn't see the danger that was hiding behind that which she was trying to protect."

Mr Mokoena appeared to have forgotten the resolutions passed by the Crisis

Committee after the kidnapping of Stompie. They instructed organisations to refuse Mrs Mandela a platform and warned her to dismantle the club "lest the community dismantle the club for her."

What prevented some witnesses from telling all was a matter of speculation. Some believe it is fear of Mrs Mandela, who, if she becomes ANC deputy president next month, will wield enormous power.

Others said ANC members were trying to play down the fact that damage limitation had been their prime concern after Stompie's abduction. Perhaps it was just old-fashioned ANC solidarity, a hard habit to break even when your comrade has been implicated in at least six murders and many more assaults.

The ANC's rather shameful day was brought to a dramatic close when Azhar Cachalia, former leading light in the liberation movement, took Mrs Mandela apart.

He strongly urged the commission to recommend that charges be brought against her. The hall burst into applause.

The pressure is piling up on the "Mother of the Nation". Yesterday questions from the lawyer for the family of Dr Abu-Baker Asvat, who was murdered after examining Stompie's body, suggested that the murder case may be reopened.

Two men were jailed for the doctor's killing. They claimed their motive was robbery, but Mrs Mandela has been linked to the murder of a man who many people believe knew too much.

Now, the killers may be about to change their story.



Kama Sutra film is a hit with Sri Lanka's women

The audience (above) leaves a cinema in Colombo, Sri Lanka, after a women-only screening of the Indian film *Kama Sutra*, which incorporates elements of the ancient

sex manual. Women's groups said they were too shy to watch with men sitting next to them, but the cinema reported big profits from the single-sex screenings. The

film, seen from a women's point of view, was made by the controversial female director Mira Nair. She had run-ins with the censors in India, who demanded cuts.

Mugabe lists white farms

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has vowed to press ahead with a controversial land reform plan which he believes is crucial for social justice. The government will today publish a list of 1,503 farms which it has earmarked for compulsory purchase from white commercial farmers to resettle landless peasants. Mr Mugabe has said he would pursue the programme even after Britain's refusal to fund it.

Although Mr Mugabe hinted he might be able to modify the plan, political analysts said he seemed determined to put up a show and to boost his popularity with peasants.

Observers have warned that a quick and massive change in land ownership would severely affect agricultural output, which contributes 40 per cent of Zimbabwe's export receipts and 60 per cent of inputs to its manufacturing sector. Mr Mugabe has said when he would take control of the farms. But in October he said this would happen "in the year of our Lord 1997".

Saddam keeps UN guessing over access to palaces

Iraq continued its dance of unpredictability yesterday, refusing access to Saddam Hussein's palaces less than 24 hours after appearing to suggest that UN inspectors would be allowed in.

The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, said the invitation was intended for international experts and diplomats, not UN inspectors.

In New York, it was announced that Iraq would not renew a deal on food-for-oil unless its grievances about the existing contract were met.

Mr al-Sahhaf said the invitation was "an Iraqi suggestion to have full and complete transparency with the world", in order to disprove a "wave of false allegations and lies" about Iraq's possession of banned weapons.

Before Iraq rejected the demands of the UN inspectors to gain access to President Saddam's 78 palaces, there had been a cautious welcome in Washington for the apparent olive branch that was offered on Wednesday night, when Iraq invited "representatives from all

the countries represented in the UN Special Commission" to stay in the palaces "for a week or more".

Yesterday, however, Bill Clinton and the US leadership were branded as liars. *Babel* newspaper said: "The American Secretary of Defense William Cohen is not different from his president or the current US Secretary of State... They are all liars." Iraq's parliament called for UN sanctions to be lifted in six months. Saadoun Hammadi, parliamentary speaker, said Iraq had met all its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, and insisted that "there are no banned weapons in Iraq".

In Moscow, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Iraq was taking a "constructive approach" to reducing tensions with the UN. The Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, said the Russian people would "continue to work for the lifting of the unfair embargo on the friendly Iraqi people".

— Steve Crawshaw

Families demand parole for jailed Chinese dissidents

Two weeks after China freed Wei Jingsheng, its best known dissident, and forced him into exile in the United States, families or supporters of several political prisoners who remain behind bars have demanded medical parole for them.

The most prominent pro-democracy activist still in jail in China, Wang Dan, 28, is the most likely candidate for another parole and exile, as the release of a high-profile name would most benefit China in its dealing with the US.

Mr Wang's mother, Wang Lingyun, said the family would renew an earlier appeal for medical parole "before the end of the year".

For several months the family has said Mr Wang's health has sharply deteriorated in jail.

"It's been half a year, they still have not said yes or no to our request for medical parole," she said. Mr Wang, a student leader in 1989, was last year jailed for 11 years for subversion. He had previously served a four-year term.



Wang Dan: Health has deteriorated sharply

Many other dissidents, whose names are unknown in the West, are languishing in jails and labour camps. The parents of Sun Liyong wrote to the Justice Minister this week, after doctors recently found their son had tuberculosis after serving all but six months of a seven-year sentence.

Mr Sun's crime was to print a publication demanding the release of those jailed after the 1989 pro-democracy process. "I'm worried he'll die in prison," Mr Sun's mother, Hu Xueling,

told Reuters news agency by telephone.

Mr Sun, like Mr Wei, has been beaten in jail by other inmates, who receive rewards for such attacks. Amnesty International has appealed for the release of 39-year-old Chen Longde who was sent to a labour camp last year for writing a letter to parliament calling for the release of Mr Wei. In August 1996 he jumped from a window to escape beatings and is still on crutches.

The wife of the veteran activist, Liu Jingsheng, who was jailed in 1995 for 15 years for subversion, has also sought medical parole for her husband.

Meanwhile, in the US, Mr Wei is getting used to being a free man again, and has been deciding between job offers which would have been utter fantasy just two weeks ago.

Yesterday he accepted an appointment as a visiting scholar at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, where he will deliver lectures and workshops.

— Teresa Poole, Peking

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Adverts tempt and taunt old comrades

Seventy years ago this month, Lenin banned commercial advertising in Russia in favour of state propaganda. Now it's back with a vengeance, writes Phil Reeves in Moscow, but to mixed reviews.

Not long ago, the Moscow-based newspaper *Kommersant* came up with what it hoped was a good wheeze. Keen to boost its modest sales, it bought some billboards and plastered them with eye-catching slogans printed in big, black letters. "Who's the boss here?" asked one. "What's going on?" said another. "How will it all end?" asked a third. "What about the money?" The questions stood without explanation; nowhere was the newspaper mentioned.

To Western eyes, it was an orthodox marketing stunt. But in Russia, consumerism is young and the social order fragile; complaints flooded in. They were subversive, said bureaucrats; it was an attempt to stir up revolutionary sentiments. In the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, officials ordered them to be torn down. In Kazan, the government blamed opposition parties and tried to close them.

In Moscow, transport officials complained the slogans were too political to be placed on trolley buses. "This reflects the mentality of the authorities," said Ruslan Arifdyanov, from *Kommersant*. "A few simple words like 'Who's the boss?' were seen as mutinous."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the advertising business has exploded in Russia. It is now turning over about \$1.2bn - a figure which industry insiders expect to grow five-fold within the next six years. Already there are 969 registered advertising companies. Yet Russians frequently regard the phenomenon with hostility. Resentment has swelled among the poor and elderly who dislike living among brash reminders of products they cannot afford. They complain that advertisements are too explicit, particularly television commercials for tampons. When Mr Yeltsin launched a new national channel called Culture TV, it boasted that it was state-funded and advertising-free (so far).

Part of the problem is demographic. As elderly Russians have less spending power than

their Western counterparts, advertisers target the young, churning out hip and sometimes raunchy ads in which scantily clad women regularly appear. Conservatives in the Orthodox Church have begun co-ordinating efforts to pass restrictive laws through parliament. It is "the propaganda of evil", says Yevgeny Nikiforov, from *Radonyezh*, a religious radio station and newspaper. "In a legal state people should be free not to be insulted and perverted by others."

The revival of advertising, which first came to Moscow in the 1870s, has come as a shock. In Soviet times, Russians were starved of even basic information about consumer products. Finding out what was on sale, and where, required access to the grapevine and a readiness to stand in queues for hours. People would frequently join a line without knowing what it was for, on the off-chance that the boots, or coats, or hats at the end of it would prove a good investment.

The small amount of Soviet advertising was about as subtle and convincing as the Communist slogans plastered in and outside every school and factory (which urged people to produce rather than consume). In a society without choice, these often seemed absurd. Russians would joke about the ubiquitous "Fly Aeroflot" signs. What other airlines could they fly?

Since then, the industry has become immeasurably more sophisticated. "What we are witnessing is the birth of a new society, a society of consumers," said Sergei Lisovsky, 38, head of the Premiere SV advertising corporation, as he sat in his office, surrounded by the trophies of wealth - sculptures, model galleons, a magnum of champagne.

His company, which handles more than half of Russia's television advertising, played a pivotal role in selling Boris Yeltsin before last year's elections, turning dismal ratings into victory by commandeering the airwaves and bombarding the electorate with commercials. It made the president into a milestone in advertising history in his own right: he is the first Russian leader who owes his place in the Kremlin in large part to marketing techniques.

Evidence of Mr Lisovsky's social revolution is abundant, at least in Moscow. The centre is awash with billboards advertising imported cars, cosmetics, electronics, cigarettes, drinks

and the other low-cost products that occupy the vanguard in Russia's faltering march towards a consumer society.

Amid all the squabbling over Russia's ads, there are glimpses of humanity. Take the scores of billboards in Moscow which show a beautiful woman in black and white, but for her eyes, which are green. Underneath are simply the words "I love you". The posters were the work of the woman's husband, Alexander Sharapov. The fact that he has a shoe business, and his wife is an ex-model, led to suspicious about his motives. But he insists that they were romantic. "Ads urge you to buy. I wanted something to make people relax. I wanted to share my feelings but without identifying myself." Lenin - a fierce prude - would not have approved.



Buy, buy: Advertising is seen in Russia as both the 'propaganda of evil' and the 'birth of a new society'

Photograph: David Kampner/Impact

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Whitehall computers not ready for millennium 'bomb'

Tax and benefit systems could crash and hospital life support machines fail because of a millennium computer bug for which at least a fifth of government departments are ill-prepared, it emerged yesterday. But the Cabinet minister responsible said everything was under control. *From Abrams and Anthony Bevis examine the evidence.*

The Government's own deadline for averting year 2000 computer failure has slipped by five months in the past year – and still many departments will be unable to meet it. Where October 1998 was once set as the final date, now March 1999 is thought soon enough. Yesterday, MPs were told that only four out of five government departments would be ready even by then – but that work was "in hand" and would be done on time. The problem has arisen because computers' internal clocks often record the date as just two digits – 97, for example – and so will click on to "00" at the millennium as if time had just gone backwards.

The Government's own computing agency has warned that failure will begin in 1999 if everything is not in place by the end of 1998. But David Clark, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was not worried. "We have established the measure of the problem and set in hand plans which are realistic and achievable," he told MPs yesterday as he published each department's assessment of its position. Four out of five plan to be ready for the millennium by March 1999; three out of five by December 1998. But submissions to Mr Clark show that

even departments' own deadlines are already being missed. The effect on taxation, benefits and other services could be catastrophic if they continue to slip. The Department of Social Security admitted that tens of thousands of its PCs would not be ready until August 1999. Others which were originally to have been ready by January 1998 will now not be ready until March 1999. Mr Clark said yesterday that he was confident enough skilled labour was available to do the necessary work. But in its report, the Ministry of Defence said: "Some factors may be beyond the control of systems

managers because of the scarcity of computer specialists." The Lord Chancellor's Department said it had already lost an experienced operator. Last night Robin Guenier, the head of the Taskforce 2000 group set up by the last government to deal with the problem, said: "This complacency is completely the wrong approach. This whole subject is so serious and it is being taken with such a low degree of urgency that it is extremely worrying," he said. He also attacked Mr Clark's assertion that the NHS had been excluded from his spending estimates because he was not re-

sponsible for it – the minister believes the problem will cost the government £370m to put right but this only covers central departments. "Someone has got to be responsible for the NHS – it employs hundreds of thousands of people and its budget is going to be absolutely enormous. Where is the money coming from?" Malcolm Bruce, the Liberal Democrats' Treasury spokesman, said Mr Clark's statement was "complacent and incomplete". Mr Clark said he believed the Government was taking the problem seriously enough.

Spinning away: the man with no name

Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's chief press secretary, went on the record for the first time yesterday to launch reforms of the Whitehall press briefing machine, but announced that he would be remaining anonymous. The Mountfield Report, which has been accepted by the Prime Minister, says that no names of officials should be reported. The Government wants Mr Campbell to be referred to as "the Prime Minister's official spokesman". Other Downing Street press spokesmen should be referred to as "an official Downing Street source", said the report. The Prime Minister's official spokesman said it would not be like the White House where briefings were televised. "It would be wrong to blow up an unelected official as a figure ...

who I am is less important than the fact that I am the spokesman of the Prime Minister," he said. He took the precaution of turning up to brief lobby journalists with a tape recorder and a microphone for the first time. A senior *Guardian* journalist, on seeing the microphone, said: "I don't broadcast except for money." A BBC correspondent asked: "does this mean you will never again say 'bollocks'?" The Prime Minister's official spokesman replied that all his comments would be on the record apart from occasional expletives. The changes are being introduced to avoid a repeat of the confusion over "spin doctor" briefings about policy on Britain's entry to the single currency. — Colin Brown



Tory faces, Tory voices: Listening to the opening speeches of the National Conservative Women's annual conference at the Queen Elizabeth II centre in Westminster, London, yesterday

Assembly for Wales in 1999

With September's referendum in Wales carried by the narrowest of majorities, the Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies, appears to have lost little time in getting the devolution show on the road. The Bill establishing a National Assembly for Wales – a title enshrined in the legislation rather than plain "Welsh Assembly" – heralded a new era for the Principality, he claimed yesterday. The 60-strong body will take over the functions of the Welsh Office and its £7bn annual budget in May 1999. Forty members – one for each of the Westminster constituencies – will be elected by the first-past-the-post system, with proportional representation delivering 20 from party-lists. The assembly will work through a committee system controlling a range of functions from education to Welsh language policy. It will not have primary legislative powers and one of its priorities will be to reform Wales' multitude of quangos. Mr Davies said the assembly would be modern, forward-looking and an institution with which people would feel comfortable. "The National Assembly for Wales will be based on modern working and political practices. I hope to see political parties working together in a positive way which will allow individuals to have their voices heard," he said. — Tony Heath

LABOUR BACKBENCHERS SHOW SIGNS OF RESTLESSNESS

MPs sign protest letters – but are they rebels?

More than 80 Labour MPs have signed a private protest about the conduct of Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone. With 100 MPs opposing the lone-parent child benefit cut in a confidential letter, Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, looks at Labour's 'new protest'.

The Prime Minister and Labour Party managers have decided to take no further action against Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone for their public protest

over the party's acceptance of a £1m donation from Formula One's Bernie Ecclestone. Following criticism by Tony Blair's Labour national executive of the two MPs for broadcasting their protest, the issue was again raised at a Wednesday evening meeting of the parliamentary committee when it was revealed that 84 MPs had signed a protest letter about their colleagues' behaviour. Led by Phyllis Starkey, the new MP for Milton Keynes South West, the letter condemned the dissenting MPs' conduct as "destructive", and alleged that they had "impugned ministers' motives" in defending ac-

ceptance of the donation. They said Ms Abbott and Mr Livingstone's criticism had been "particularly unfortunate", given that it contradicted Mr Blair's defence of the leadership stance at a private meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party from which the two dissenters were absent. One Labour MP who has seen the Starkey letter said last night that it had been signed by the "Stepford Wives and Millbank Men"; MPs who, allegedly, slavishly follow the leadership in all things. "I hold no brief for Abbott and Livingstone," the MP said, "but this letter can only be interpreted as an invitation to chuck them out of the Parli-

mentary Labour Party. As such, it is an insult to parliamentary democracy and the rights of MPs to exercise conscience on matters of public importance." It is understood that other (legible) signatories include Melanie Johnson, Weylyn Hatfield; Christine McCafferty, Calder Valley; Valerie Davey, Bristol West; Betty Williams, Conwy; Andrew Dismore, Hendon; and Syd Rapson, Portsmouth North. Following whips' pressure on Labour MPs to pull their names off a public Commons motion that criticises Government plans to cut lone-parent child benefit, it was revealed yesterday that 100 MPs had signed a more discreet protest letter, allegedly organised by Chris Mullin, MP for Sunderland South, to Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

However, the fact that the MPs have been unwilling to make a public stand suggests that they are very unlikely to press their hostility to a vote against the Government. The original Commons motion, sponsored by Audrey Wise, Labour MP for Preston, was signed by another 18 MPs on Wednesday, but only half of them were Labour and yet another Labour MP, Midlothian's Eric Clarke, removed his name.

Mayors for English cities

Birmingham and Manchester could acquire powerful elected mayors months before London if they take advantage of new proposals for democracy in the cities of England. A Green Paper is due in the spring on arrangements for reforming the way decisions are taken in London, but if a private member's Bill introduced yesterday passes quickly, England's other cities could take the first steps down a road which could see powerful individuals elected to represent their interests. The prospects for change are good. The Government promised to back the Bill introduced by Lord Hunt of Tanworth, which empowers councils to revamp the way they are run. Although some Labour councillors are none too keen on ceding powers to a mayor, the Labour-dominated Local Government Association is supporting the measure on the grounds that individual authorities will be left free to decide which arrangements best favour local conditions. — David Walker

Commons reports attack Jowell over tobacco sponsorship

Labour MPs last night launched a withering assault on the Government's case for seeking a permanent exemption for Formula One motor racing from a ban on tobacco sponsorship. Two cross-party committees, both chaired by senior Labour MPs, delivered reports undermining the defence of government policy by Tessa Jowell, the public health minister, who is due to fight Britain's case in the European Union council next week. One committee challenged

the Government's central claim that it was exempting motor racing because it would lead to the loss of 50,000 jobs in Britain. Both reports said all sports should be equally treated. The decision to rush out the reports will be seen as an attempt to force the Government into a U-turn over its policy at the EU council in Brussels. The *Independent* understands that the Government is preparing a fall-back position to exempt Formula One for 10 years, but

the reports will add weight to EU demands for a compromise which will suit all sports. Within 24 hours of taking evidence from Ms Jowell, the Commons Select Committee on Health said: "We believe Formula One should be placed under the same pressure as other sports to seek alternative sponsorship." But a more damning verdict was delivered by the cross-party select committee on European legislation, which said the claims by

the motor racing chiefs, led by Bernie Ecclestone, that the sport would relocate needed to be "treated with some reserve". Coming a day after the Labour Party repaid a £1m donation to Mr Ecclestone, the report raises questions about why the Prime Minister found the industry's arguments so convincing. The committee said: "Why should Formula One be singled out for an exemption...? It said the proposal to exempt Formula One motor racing from the ban

"deserves closer examination". The Prime Minister's office said last night that the Government was engaged in negotiations about the EU directive, and said other countries found difficulties in accepting the EU proposals as currently drafted. However, Ms Jowell has made it clear she wants to secure an agreement, and to avoid Britain being part of a hocking minority, raising expectations of a last-minute compromise. — Colin Brown

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Team work: Pupils and staff at Dalston Youth Project in east London surround Tony Blair during his visit yesterday to see how the project helps divert 11- to 18-year-olds from crime. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

Carrot and stick approach to youth crime

A new hybrid sentence, half custody, half community supervision, will be a key element of the Government's drive against youth crime, the Home Secretary announced yesterday.

The length of custodial time under the so-called Detention and Training Orders (DTOs) will be increased or cut down to give offenders an incentive to improve their behaviour.

It is estimated that up to 200 young people aged 12 to 14 could be kept in detention around the country at any one time, at secure training units.

Children aged 12 to 14 awaiting trial, as well as the more vulnerable 15- to 16-year-olds, will be remanded for the first time to secure local authority accommodation, to combat the problem of

bailed youngsters continuing on crime sprees.

Another proposal, unveiled by Jack Straw as part of a White Paper on youth justice, is the concept of a youth panel for first-time young offenders, where the culprits would be "confronted with the damage and human consequences of their crime". Under the idea - still under consultation - the youngster and their parents would have to draw up a good behaviour contract, lasting for up to a year.

Mr Straw told the Commons that his aim was to deliver a youth justice system which prevented youngsters getting involved in offending, as well as punishing those who did. The White Paper, *No More Excuses*, which will form part of next month's Crime and Disorder Bill, will also

attempt to speed up the judicial process.

The White Paper includes plans for local curfew schemes to keep under-10s off the streets, and a new Parenting Order.

Mr Straw added that he was chairing a new ministerial group looking at ways of supporting families more effectively.

As expected, the Government will abolish the rule of *doli incapax*, the presumption that children under 14 cannot commit a criminal act because they cannot distinguish between right and wrong. Senior police officers welcomed many of the proposals. However, prison campaigners the Howard League warned that the new DTOs would lead to more younger children being locked up.

— Michael Streeter,
Legal Affairs Correspondent

Loophole may leave young unprotected by low-pay law

The Government was accused of putting a loophole in its minimum wage legislation by excluding those under 26 years of age. Colin Brown, Chief Political Correspondent, says employers face fines of up to £5,000 for breaking the laws designed to help six million workers.

The Minimum Wage Bill was hailed by Margaret Beckett, the President of the Board of Trade, as the "beginning of the end" in poverty pay, but Tory MPs said it paved the way for another Government U-turn.

Clause three of the Bill gives the Government the power to exempt workers aged under 26 from the minimum pay legislation, or to apply a different rate, if it is recommended by the Government's low pay com-

mission, which is due to report in the Spring.

The inclusion of the let-out clause for a large part of the workforce, which is facing low pay, will be seen as a partial victory for Peter Mandelson, the minister without portfolio, who called for flexibility in its operation during the Labour Party conference in October.

Mrs Beckett won her argument that the minimum wage will be the same across the country, but she could be forced to concede the lower rate for younger workers.

While trade union leaders welcomed the Bill as a "landmark", a lower rate for trainees raised some fears it could be used to water down the impact of the Bill. John Edmunds, general secretary of the GMB, said he remained "very concerned" that young workers could be discriminated against.

The Tories, too, were sceptical. "It looks as though the Government is going to do a

complete U-turn. Mrs Beckett is still saying she may not use the powers but it is pretty odd to put such a strong clause three into the Bill if there is no intention of using it," said John Redwood, the Tory spokesman on trade and industry.

The Bill carries strong powers to fine employers breaking the law up to £5,000. But the rate at which the national minimum wage will be fixed will not be known until after the Low Pay Commission reports. Its recommendations will then be considered by the Cabinet.

There is speculation that the final figure could be £3.50-£3.75 an hour, but Mrs Beckett refused to be drawn. She said she was "proud" to bring forward the legislation, which campaigners estimated could boost the pay of six million workers, including low paid homeworkers, domestics, nannies and agency staff.

"It will be a single rate that will apply to all regions, sectors

and size of firm," said Mrs Beckett, adding that the Government was keen to make sure the rate was set as a "sensible" level.

"This is both a very important day and a very proud day because it is the beginning of the end of poverty pay."

The legislation also sets out six new offences aimed at employers who refuse to pay the new wage. These cover refusal or wilful neglect to pay the rate, failure to keep records, or failure to give information to enforcement officers.

Trade minister Ian McCartney said that most workers will be covered by the new rate, including homeworkers, who can earn at present as little as 35p an hour.

The only people not covered will be the self-employed, people who do a few hours a week voluntary work for groups like the Citizens Advice Bureau, children below school leaving age and prisoners.

Treasury on defensive over tax credit

The Chancellor was forced on the defensive yesterday over his plan for a tax credit for low-paid families. The Treasury insisted that it would not necessarily cost women money, as critics charge. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, explains the controversy.

Budget earlier this week. This allowance would reach low-income tax payers through their pay packet. The Chancellor has portrayed it as a better incentive to work than a benefit payment such as the existing family credit.

However, critics have long argued that a tax credit could not work in practice because it would require needs to be assessed on the basis of household rather than individual income.

Otherwise, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, higher earners would benefit disproportionately. That would mean a big tax increase for second earners - mainly women - who would start paying tax on their first pound of earnings. In addition, if the working-families tax credit, which would go to the main

taxpayer, replaced family credit, which is received mainly by mothers, it would involve a transfer of cash from women to men.

Even Treasury officials and advisers have been warning the Chancellor of these potential drawbacks of the scheme, as *The Independent* reported last week.

Yesterday, Ed Balls, a senior economic adviser to the Chancellor, said that the details of the new tax credit would not be decided until after the report of the commission on tax and benefit reform, headed by Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays Bank. This is due ahead of next March's Budget.

Mr Balls said: "We are not necessarily going to end the independent taxation of women. It is not an inevitable consequence of the working-families tax credit." The idea of intro-

ducing it alongside family credit had not been ruled out.

He attacked the Institute for Fiscal Studies for "setting up an Aunt Sally". Their assessment was based on an "extreme and absurd" version of the plan.

Andrew Dilnot, Director of the IFS, said yesterday: "We were trying to set out the consequences of going down a variety of different paths. There are lots of choices, and each direction throws up problems of different types."

The Treasury published a paper yesterday on the background to the Chancellor's proposals to make work pay. Along with the working-families tax credit, the minimum wage and the pledge to introduce a 10p income tax rate, when prudent, are intended to raise take-home pay for the poor.

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Spencers' alimony and acrimony

Details of the divorce settlement offered by Earl Spencer to his estranged wife emerged yesterday as papers lodged in court described him as an "intolerant and angry" bully. Steve Boggan examines the claim and counterclaim and hears the response from England.

Earl Spencer has offered his estranged wife a £292,682 settlement, a house worth £244,000, a car, a monthly tax-free income of £2,439 and full maintenance for their four children.

They were the precise details put before the High Court in Cape Town yesterday as the couple's preliminary divorce hearing rumbled into its fourth acrimonious day. The offer was being regarded in England as insufficient for a man with a personal wealth of £6m and a family fortune of £100m.

Details of the offer were given by Shelly-Ano Claircourt, one of the earl's lawyers, who described it as the largest ever made in South Africa. But it is by no means the biggest ever made in England, where Lady Spencer is applying to have the case heard.

"This offer made to Victoria [Lockwood] represents an unprecedented amount for a woman or wife in this country, particularly considering the brevity of this marriage," she said. The couple were married in 1989 and split five years later after Lady Spencer underwent five months of treatment for alcoholism and eating disorders.

It was during her treatment that she claims Earl Spencer had affairs with 12 women. He denies the allegation.

Miss Claircourt said the earl had given an undertaking that Lady Spencer's requirements could be reassessed by an English court should she ever decide to move home from Cape Town, where both parties live at present.

She, however, is pursuing a claim for £3.75m. In support of that, Lady Spencer has submitted a sworn statement to the court in which she describes her husband as a *domineering bully* who ordered her not to attend the funeral of his sister, Diana, Princess of Wales, so he could attend with his latest partner, the model Josie Borean. The papers say he became "intolerant and angry and he increasingly criticised, undermined, bullied and belittled me until eventually I lost all confidence and became very scared of him". She claims she is broke, surviving on an overdraft of £5,000.

Nicholas Mostyn, a British barrister specialising in family law, told the court that the earl's alleged extra-marital affairs would have no bearing on a settlement if the case were heard in England. "It takes three to commit adultery," he added. "It is a symptom of a broken marriage."

In defence of Earl Spencer, David Horton-Fawkes, a childhood friend and now manager of the earl's British interests, said in a statement that Lady Spencer had been given kind and loving support from the earl, and had written to thank him for it.

"I know that Charles would never treat the mother of his four children in a mean or malicious manner," he said.



Star turn: George Best (second from right), yesterday given second place - after Brazil's Pele - as Greatest Footballer of All Time, being congratulated by (from left) former England goal keeper Gordon Banks, Northern Ireland goal keeper Pat Jennings and 1996 World Cup star Alan Ball; Further Report, Sport, page 11

Scare over toy in food

Worries over food which contains toy gifts have resurfaced after a child nearly choked.

Braintree Trading Standards is investigating the case after a mother complained that she had found a toy in the yoghurt section of Müller's Kids Corner.

Müller has withdrawn the yoghurt from sale although it stresses that no changes occurred because of the complaint.

The Environmental Health Officer in Braintree complained to Müller on 5 September that an inkstamp toy had been found in the yoghurt rather than the separate section. The company launched an investigation and later the toy was replaced by a troll.

"While Müller Kids Corner yoghurts have been very popular production ceased last month to make way for two new Müller children's yoghurts - Yogh Crunch and Yogh Buddiblasters," said a spokeswoman. "It is factually incorrect to suggest production changes occurred in response to a complaint that has yet to be resolved." There have been three recorded deaths in the past 10 years of children who have choked on toys packaged in with food.

— Glenda Cooper

Lloyd George freed his would-be assassin

Prime Minister David Lloyd George ordered a woman who had plotted to murder him in 1917 to be freed from prison to prevent a public relations disaster, according to secret government documents released yesterday. John Crossland looks at the files of the Public Record Office.

Lloyd-George, the Prime Minister who personified Britain's victory in the First World War, personally intervened to ensure the early release of hunger striker Alice Wheeldon, a suffragette pacifist who had plotted to murder him and Arthur Henderson, leader of the Labour Party, at the height of the war.

The top secret file, originally

marked for closure until after the millennium, reveals that the prosecution case against Wheeldon, 32, was based on the testimony of MI5 agent Alex Gordon, whose damning evidence at the Old Bailey in February 1917 condemned her to 10 years' penal servitude.

Lloyd-George obviously had his doubts about the case when, approaching by worried Home Office officials fearing for her health after a prolonged hunger strike, told them: "In view of the fact that I am a person she conspired to murder it's very undesirable that she should die in prison."

Gordon said in a confidential report used at the trial that he was introduced to Wheeldon at the Derby Socialists' Hall with other "semi-patriots of the milk and bun-throwing type".

He took her more seriously, however, when she asked him whether he was prepared to

"remove" two men by poison - including Lloyd George.

The leader of the seamen's union tried, unsuccessfully, to keep homosexuality illegal aboard British Merchant Navy ships as the Sexual Offences Bill made its shaky progress into law in 1966, according to PRO files released yesterday.

William Hogarth, General Secretary of National Union of Seamen, sought Harold Wilson's help to prevent the Bill applying to his members.

He told the Prime Minister bluntly "Unless special consideration is given to the position of the Merchant Navy it could become an attractive venue for homosexuals." This unknown factor in the fraught discussions leading to the passing of Leo Abse's Bill the following year emerged in a release of Home Office papers on homosexual reform, some of the originally closed for more than a century.

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South Sea islands fight for first place in millennial dawn

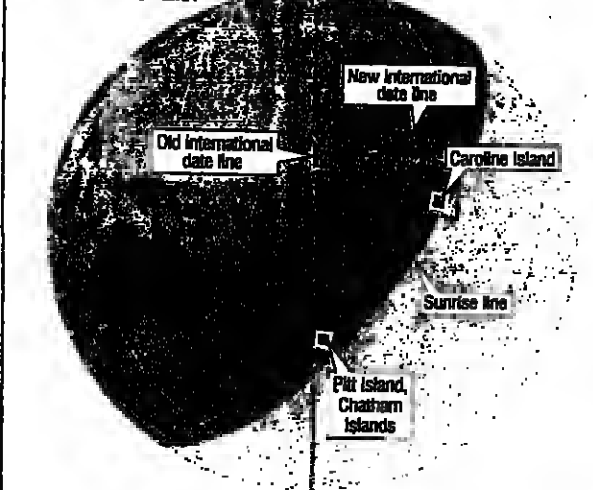
A group of scientists claims to have finally determined the place from which to see the first sunrise of the millennium: Mount Hakepi, on Pitt Island to the east of New Zealand. But behind the maths lies a furious battle for tourists' dollars. Charles Arthur, Science Editor, explains.

On the face of it, the solution to the equation above is clear: 0359 local time. That, says a research paper in the latest *Geographical Journal*, published by the Royal Geographical Society, is where the first dawn of the new millennium will be seen, according to the equation for calculating sunrise times published in the US Navy and Royal Observatory *Astronomical Almanac* (1994 edition).

And the place: the 177-metre summit of Mount Hakepa, on the tiny Pitt Island – presently, home to just 55 people – 680 miles east of New Zealand.

But rather than being a definitive answer, this could be just the latest round in a vicious battle being fought in the South Pacific to win tourist business

NEW DAWN:
the sunrise will illuminate Caroline Island before Pitt Island – but is the revised date line valid?



HOW TO FIND THE MILLENNIUM DAWN

$T = 0.99727 (\alpha - \lambda \pm \cos(-\tan \phi \tan \delta)) - (\text{GMST at 0000 UT})$
Where T=time of sunrise; α =right ascension of Sun; λ =east longitude; ϕ =latitude; δ =declination of sun; GMST=Greenwich Mean Standard Time; UT=Universal Time

from travellers wanting to witness the authentic first dawn of the next 1000 years.

A number of islands have been planning lucrative millennium tours, promising visi-

lors they will be the first to see in the year 2000. Last year, the Tongan government was considering introducing daylight saving time so that it could pip New Zealand to the millenni-

um post. But all seem to have been beaten by the Republic of Kiribati, whose Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared in January 1995 that all the islands in its jurisdiction would take the same day of the week.

Though outwardly reasonable, this decision unilaterally put a huge, 1000-mile eastward bulge into the International Date Line — and, coincidentally, brought Caroline Island, an uninhabited atoll previously on the extreme eastern side of the line (and so at the end of every solar day) over to the western side — and thus the start of each day.

That seems to have dismayed a team at the Millennium Adventure Company, based in New Zealand. They returned to their maps, consulted tables of sunrise calculation times to determine that the first sunrise would, after all, be seen off Pitt Island.

They are dismissive of Kiribati's tactics. "The arbitrary and unilateral moving of time zones or the international date line does not give rise to any level of credibility in the international navigational community," they write. "Any claim on the first millennium sunrise from a place geographically quite removed from the traditional dateline lacks sensibility, as any country in the world could do the same."



Island dawn: Mount Hakena on Pitt Island, where the first rays of the millennium will strike Photograph: Robert Harding

Polluters' tax aims to clean up rivers

Proposals for new taxes on water pollution were unveiled yesterday.
Nicholas Schoon,
Environment.
Correspondent, looks at the options.

Taxes on pesticides, fertilisers, sewage works and factories were all floated in a government consultation paper yesterday. The idea is to use the power of the market to cut water pollution, as well as regulation.

The document points out that while rivers have been getting cleaner, 40 per cent of their combined length in England and Wales is classified as only "fair" or "poor". Further improvement would benefit leisure pursuits, provide cleaner raw material for water companies and boost economic regeneration.

One idea is for companies along a big waterway, such as the Thames Estuary, to trade pollution permits between themselves. Each would be given a right to pump out a certain amount of pollution, and permits to cover that quota. Over time, the quantity of permits would fall — forcing the group of polluters to make an overall cut in emissions.

The companies could then trade these permits among themselves, allowing the free market to set a value. Companies which found it relatively cheap and easy to cut pollution would sell some of their permits to those which faced major ex-

to those which faced major ex-

pense and inconvenience in doing so. Pollution would be cut—but the trade in permits should ensure it was done in the least costly way. It is a system that has been tried, with some success, for reducing acid-rain air pollution in the United States.

The other main alternative is to tax companies according to the quantity and toxicity of their water pollution. The consultation paper says nothing about how much such a tax could raise, but *The Independent* understands that at most it would be in the low hundreds of millions of pounds.

The paper is also vague on the question of where the money raised would go. This is because the Government itself is divided. The Treasury remains strongly opposed to allocating the money to any specific purpose. It wants the freedom to spend it as it sees fit. The Department of the Environment, which published the paper, is interested in at least some of the money going into river clean-up schemes and covering the costs of running the taxation system.

The Government's pollution regulator, the Environment Agency, is also keen to get its hands on some of the cash. At present it raises £40m from water-polluting companies by charging them for licences which give them the right to produce pollution up to a certain maximum limit. However, this only covers the workload created by the system rather than environmental damage.

1. *Chlorophyll a* (Chl *a*)

Taking the green road to Kyoto

There is only one way for the truly dedicated environmentalist to get to the Kyoto climate summit in Japan - by train, ship and bicycle. Nicholas Schoon spoke to weary travellers who have done just that.

Exactly three weeks ago, eight young people set off from Waterloo Station, London, intent on reaching Kyoto without using any aircraft, and so producing less global-warming carbon dioxide on their journey. Their numbers swelled to 30 on the way, and they are due to reach their destination tomorrow. The scientists and ecologists were almost halted by visa problems on route and their satellite telephone was nearly confiscated at the Chinese border. But this morning they were due to set off from the Japanese port of Kobe for Kyoto, 50 miles away, by bicycle. Could they be sure that they had produced less global warming than 8,000 miles by land and

see than on a jet? "Are you kidding?" said one of the travellers, Dr Dietrich Brochhagen, a German physicist who works for the European Parliament's transport committee. "It took me eight days and nights to work this out." Each traveller would have been responsible for four times as much carbon dioxide if they had flown, he said.

The idea came from Ben Matthews, a post-graduate scientist at the University of East Anglia. He and his partner, Michelle Valentine, spread the word by Internet and e-mail; most of the travellers had never met face to face. The journey began with the Eurostar at Waterloo, joined the Trans Siberian Express in Moscow, travelling to Peking, and crossed to Japan from China by sea.

Richard Scrase, a Green Party fundraiser from Bath, said Klobe: "... to prevent dangerous climate change, there will have to be changes in lifestyle - you can't do it all through technical fixes." The group will lobby delegates to back the idea of each nation and its citizens being given a quota of carbon emissions, which can be traded for money.

[illegible]

The death of Matthew Harding, the Labour-supporting vice chairman of Chelsea, in a helicopter crash last year has led to a tightening of flying regulations. Randeep Ramesh, Transport Correspondent, examines the official inquiry into the tragedy.

The seeds of the disaster — which claimed four lives — were sown early. Michael Goss, the pilot who was operating his own one-man business, was on the first of seven planned flights for Mr Harding and, according to the official report, could have been under "intense commercial pressure" to press on with the trip from Bolton to London whatever the weather.

Despite being an experienced pilot, he had neither the qualifications nor experience to control his aircraft after it got into difficulties.

To make matters worse, Mr Goss had gone off route on the night of the crash and headed for an area of high ground —

According to the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) report, the 38-year-old was not qualified to fly on instruments, became disoriented and overworked, and could not save the aircraft after it went into a steep nose-up position then spiralled to the ground.

But the type of flight Mr Goss attempted, which involved avoiding obstacles such as high ground by detouring around them, "required a standard of flight planning and in-flight navigation accuracy which was not achieved and which was probably unachievable under the circumstances", the report said.

Mr Goss, a former British Army helicopter pilot, Mr Harding, 42, and three of the Chelsea vice-chairman's friends died instantly when the twin-engined French Aerospatiale Squirrel crashed near Middlewich, Cheshire, in October last year.

Only three weeks before the crash, Tony Blair and his wife Cherie had travelled in the same helicopter on their way

The AAB called for a tightening of helicopter pilot operating and training. A spokesman for the Civil Aviation Authority, the air safety regulator, said they have already been acted upon.

The new rules include ensuring the minimum height for any flight at night shall be not less than 1,000ft above the highest obstacle within 10 miles each side of the intended route, and stricter weather criteria for night flying.

Those who died with Mr Harding and Mr Goss were Raymond Deane, 43, from Camberley, Surrey; father-of-two Tony Burrige, a company director, of Wimbledon, south-west London; and journalist John Bauldie, 47, from Richmond, south-west London.

Mr Harding, who was worth more than £200m, and his party had been celebrating Chelsea's victory over Bolton. His widow, Ruth, and their four children are thought to have received about £50m, while about £25m went to his mistress, Vicky Jaramillo, by whom he had a daughter.



The show must go on: Tim Barlow, who severely tore ligaments in his leg last week, plays

Photograph: Asadour Guzel

Doctors have identified a new herbal remedy for jetlag. Feverfew, the plant used to treat migraine, has been shown to contain substantial amounts of melatonin which is known to help regulate the body's internal clock.

Canadian researchers who analysed leaf samples of feverfew and two other herbs - St John's Wort used to treat depression, and Huang-qin - found melatonin present in all three. They speculate in the *Lancet* that the presence of melatonin may partly explain their medicinal effects.

The long term effects of melatonin are unknown and its sale was banned in Britain in 1995, although it is available on prescription. The researchers say their findings demonstrate that herbal remedies may contain powerful agents and emphasise the need for full investigation of the chemicals in them.

— Jeremy Lawrence
Health Editor


London and Dublin have reached agreement on transferring 30 more republican prisoners in British jails to complete their sentences in the Irish Republic.

Dublin sources said the deal, to be confirmed early next week, will start with three IRA prisoners whose transfers are already pending, following shortly by six more, once enabling legislation has been passed by the Dail before Christmas. This will harmonise long-term fixed sentence tariffs between the two jurisdictions.

The remaining 11 will move in the New Year. Irish sources stressed the prisoners will not be released earlier than if held in Britain, but will bring them closer to families.


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Let children eat crisps, says doctor

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Let children eat crisps, says doctor

Society's obsession with healthy eating and exercise driving children to anorexia. Chocolate, crisps and chips are good for people, a leading expert in eating disorders said yesterday. Judith Juv, Education Editor, explains why Dr Dee Dawson wants children to eat Mars bars rather than celery sticks.

Around half of six-year-old girls are worried about their weight. Between 1 and 2 per cent of girls are anorexic and 5 per cent of sixth-formers are bulimic. Dr Dee Dawson, medical director of the Hodes Farm Clinic in London, told heads of leading girls' independent schools that we must stop making children feel guilty about food.

Dawson recently had a six-year-old in her clinic who was crying and refusing to eat because her thighs were too fat, she said. The Girls' Schools Association annual conference in Bristol, she said, should be circulating the muscle-wasted models of fashion magazines and pointing out that page three girls in the Sun newspaper do not look like that.

"Arlin Monroe was at least size 16, as indeed are 47 per cent of the female population," she said.

"The media, the fashion industry, teachers, parents and the Government all played a part in ruining some children's lives by incessant talk about the evils of fat, chocolate, cheese, crisps and chips are wonderful energy-giving foods which children need. Almost without exception my patients are fat phobic."

"Almost all had been putting weight on their cereals before they were admitted," she added.

One would not go swimming in case she said she absorbed fat from fat people in the water. Teachers should not tell children that a low-fat diet was healthy, and mothers should not eat salad in front of their children and snack on cheesecake and ice-cream when they were in bed.

Advice being prepared by the Government for children's diet and leaked recently was wrong, she argued. It is said to recommend banning school tuck shops, banning chips from school canteens and restricting chocolate sales from vending machines. Government advice on school meals published earlier this year already advises restricting fat intake. But Dr Dawson said there was not a shred of evidence to suggest that children should avoid fat.

"I would like to say to the Government think twice before you panic yet more children into a life of chronic starvation and possible death," she said.

Parents and schools could do more to help, she believes. Parents needed to face up more readily to their children's eating disorders. Schools should weigh all pupils every term and those about whom they were worried every week without divulging the results, she suggested.

Isabel Raphael, head of Channing School in north-east London, said that the fashion industry was partly to blame for girls' worries about their weight. "I have had perfectly normal developing girls in my room who say they can't go to the local shopping centre with their friends because they can't find anything fashionable that fits," she said.

Penelope Penney of the Haberdashers' Aske's Girls' School in Hertfordshire, said her school was considering weighing all girls in the third year but it would be difficult to organise it more than twice a year.



Model Trish Goff, for Valentino 1996: Dr Dee Dawson says society should ridicule the thin images of fashion and stop children's guilt about food. Photograph: All Action

Millionaire to boost aid to state schools' best pupils

The millionaire entrepreneur whose £250,000 donation, announced this week, will help fund new partnerships between private and state schools, will donate similar sums every year, he has revealed to *The Independent*. In an exclusive interview, Peter Lampl tells Lucy Word, Education Correspondent, of his desire to stop British talent going to waste.



Lampl: 'There was a great waste of talent in the UK'

graduated from Corpus Christi in 1970.

His fellow students at the college, which has a historical link with south Wales, included a regular intake of bright grammar school boys from mining families in the Valleys who moved on after graduation to high profile jobs in the City and in academia.

Almost three decades on, however, after years spent in the United States building his investment business, Mr Lampl paid a return visit to his alma mater to find that Corpus Christi had a Welsh student for several years. The reason, he was told, was a lack of applications combined with a feeling that schools in the area did not raise pupils to the standard where the college could accept them.

"When I left [the country] it felt as if things were changing and a lot more people were coming through from average backgrounds," he said yesterday, "yet when I come back it has gone the other way."

The apparent reversal jarred in comparison with the education system across the Atlantic, where Mr Lampl, himself state-educated, observed "a more egalitarian approach ... It struck me there was an enormous waste of talent in the UK."

Eighteen months ago, he set up an educational foundation which launched and funded a 64-place summer school at Oxford University last July for young people from state schools which had previously not sent pupils to the university.

After 40 per cent of those attending applied for places at Oxford, there are now plans to expand the scheme and to extend it to other universities.

Fresh from that success, dreamt up under the last government, Mr Lampl, now based in London, was willing to work with a Labour administration committed to promoting "what works" in education. "I have a similar agenda as the government," he said, "and it makes sense to pursue these initiatives together to break down the barriers between the independent and state sectors."

Warning over student fees

Universities were yesterday given a blunt warning not to try to supplement their income by charging students top-up fees.

David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, made it clear that the Government was prepared to use reserve powers contained in the Teaching and Higher Education Bill to block any attempt by universities to create an elite British Ivy

League. Institutions would gain nothing by introducing top-up charges, he said, because an equal sum would be withdrawn from their government grant.

The Bill, which received its first reading in the House of Lords on Wednesday, opens the way for the introduction of £1,000 means-tested annual tuition fees from next September and the abolition of grants for

living costs. There will also be loans to cover maintenance costs, repayable after graduation through the Inland Revenue, according to income.

Ministers were yesterday anxious to stress that, while fees were necessary to stave off a funding crisis in higher education, poorer families would not suffer as a result.

— Lucy Word

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Fake vodka wreaks havoc on Russia

The dimensions of Russia's catastrophic alcohol problems became horribly clear yesterday with a claim by the government that this year 43,000 people died from drinking bootleg vodka.

The figures underline one of the causes behind the precipitous drop in Russia's population, which last year fell by about 430,000 – the equivalent of the loss of a city the size of Edinburgh. The demographic crisis has seen the average life expectancy for a male level out at only 58.

Delivering the statistics, Boris Yeltsin, head of the Interior Ministry's economic crimes division, said the police had identified 1,400 underground stills in Russia, more than 10 times the number of registered distilleries.

Large quantities are also smuggled in from abroad. "Every second bottle of vodka has been produced illegally," he said.

So common are fatalities from moonshine that only the worst incidents, such as the death by poisoning of 22 people in Krasnoyarsk in June, make headlines. In Moscow, moves have begun to crack down on fake vodka by introducing a law which compels all alcohol manufacturers to sell their wares through one retailer.

But controlling the heavily criminalised drinks industry is an awesome undertaking, littered with past failures. The 147 million population is at risk from poisoning as never before because alcohol consumption, and particularly binge drinking, has risen steeply amid the economic malaise that has followed the Soviet Union's collapse.

The cost of this was graphically revealed by other numbers released yesterday: there were 1,295 murders in Moscow in the first 10 months of the year, of which one in four are believed to have been committed by people who were drunk.

— Phil Reeves, Moscow



Away from home: Slovakian refugees leaving the benefits office in Dover, Kent

Photograph: Bill Graham/Kent News and Pictures

Cook closes the door on gypsies

Britain's 'open door' policy towards central and eastern Europe does not extend to the Romany population. Katherine Butler in Prague says a blunt warning to Czech leaders signals that the free movement of citizens could prove an obstacle in the EU enlargement negotiations.

Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, pledged yesterday to "throw open the doors of the European union" to the Czech republic. The warmth of his embrace however was not im-

mediately felt among the country's 300,000 gypsies, who were warned to expect no welcome in Britain.

Mr Cook's tough words appeared aimed at demonstrating to a home audience the Government's ruthless approach to illegal immigrants or benefit scroungers. His warnings are a response to anger in Kent and on the right-wing press over the sudden arrival through the port of Dover last month of almost 700 Czech and Slovak gypsies, many claiming to have fled persecution and to be seeking asylum.

"We have a very clear message to anyone contemplating travelling to Britain. Britain does not have an open-door policy to those who allege per-

secution and cannot then prove it," Mr Cook said. "Britain has a clear duty to get across the message that it is not an cannot be a soft touch for those claiming asylum on the basis of false claims."

Last month's arrivals were apparently prompted by a Czech television film which presented Britain as a paradise for refugees. The exodus, according to diplomats in Prague, nevertheless reflects the extent to which the Romany community feels victimised in the Czech Republic. Violence is common: a Romany man was beaten to death in front of his children by skinheads in one recent incident.

Mr Cook raised what he called the "flood" of gypsies to

Britain in three meetings with Czech political leaders yesterday, when the immediate question was covered of repatriating gypsies whose asylum applications have been rejected.

The Czechs have promised almost £20,000 to cover the costs of sending rejecting families home. The Foreign Secretary was careful to avoid any suggestion that the gypsies are the victims of political persecution in the Czech Republic, but delivered a firm warning in the context of EU enlargement that their treatment would have to improve. One of the complaints is that Romany children are systematically placed in schools for the retarded because Czech is not their mother tongue. Illit-

eracy, unemployment and criminality are all extremely high and the Czech government's insistence that many gypsies are ethnically Slovak means they have difficulty establishing citizenship rights.

President Vaclav Havel, who left his sick bed to meet the Foreign Secretary, and the Prime Minister, Vaclav Klaus were both told that the Czech government must offer the gypsies hope of a better life. The Foreign Secretary heard details of 30 measures which the Czech authorities, anxious that the issue could damage EU membership hopes, are promising.

"The Romanies need not fear for their return," Jaroslav Sedivy, the Czech foreign minister, said.

French vow to cut road deaths in half

The French government has tough plans to halve the number of road deaths in France in five years. John Lichfield in Paris says a proposed law would jail anyone convicted twice within 12 months of dangerous speeding.

Your chances of dying in a road accident double as soon as you cross the Channel. For every million vehicles, 300 people die on the French roads each year, compared to 140 in Britain.

The carnage has been much reduced in the past two decades. France is no longer the most murderous place to drive in Europe (try Greece, Portugal, Ireland or Belgium).

But 8,000 deaths a year is still an awful lot of grief and suffering – the equivalent of 50 large plane crashes.

Jean-Claude Gayssot, the Communist transport minister and a former railwayman, has set an ambitious new target. He wants to reduce the number of road deaths to 4,000 a year by the year 2002.

His programme includes a draconian measure to discourage speeding, which is responsible for almost half the deaths on French roads. A draft law will be placed before the National Assembly next year which

would impose a three-month driving ban and a £1,000 fine on anyone breaking the speed limit by more than 50 kph (roughly 30 miles per hour).

Any motorist convicted of the same offence within a year could be jailed. In other words, anyone caught travelling at 120 mph on the *autoroute*, or 60 mph in an urban area, twice within a year, would risk going to jail.

Mr Gayssot also plans voluntarily to begin with – send French motorists back to driving school. Young drivers will be encouraged to attend refresher courses after a year, and all drivers after 10 years. A fifth of the courses will be optional but the minister wants yesterday that he would make them compulsory if driving standards did not improve. The courses will, among other things, focus on the two most common causes of road deaths in France: drink driving (1,300 deaths a year) and failure to fasten seat-belts (700 deaths a year).

In the case of the still-known road accident in France this year (at the Pont de l'Alma in Paris on 31 August), all five of the most commonly cited factors were present.

The Mercedes carrying Princess of Wales was travelling at three times the urban speed limit; the driver, Henri Paul, consumed almost three times the legal drink limit; and three people who died were not wearing their seat-belts.

Kosovo deaths raise tension

Two people were killed in Serbia's troubled province of Kosovo in clashes between ethnic Albanians and Serb police yesterday.

One Serbian policeman and one ethnic Albanian assailant were killed early yesterday in an attack on a Serb police station in the village of Reznik, near Decan, 60 miles west of the province's capital, Pristina. Heavy police forces sealed

off Reznik yesterday and blocked all roads in the vicinity of the village.

The chief of police of the village of Obilic, Bozidar Spisak, who was kidnapped on Wednesday, was released yesterday with light injuries.

The upsurge in violence coincides with the trial of Kosovo Albanians charged with terrorism.

— AP, Pristina

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17/TERRORISM

Spain follows Irish example to peace in Basque Country

An ambitious plan has been put together to bring peace to the Basque Country. Strongly influenced by the Irish example, it seeks to achieve by consensus some of the constitutional changes sought by the armed separatist organisation Eta. Elizabeth Nash in Madrid examines an initiative which has won supporters across Spain's political spectrum.

A plan has been maturing over two years that seeks to achieve by consensus an extension of Basque rights that could meet some of the demands of the separatist organisation Eta. The plan, details of which are now emerging, has won support among representatives of a wide range of Spanish opinion, including a leading conservative lawyer who was one of the five authors of the post-Franco democratic constitution of 1978.

The proposal, expected to be discussed in the New Year by regional parliaments of both the Basque Country and Navarra, would eventually have to be approved by parliament in Madrid. It is backed by all Basque political parties including the pro-Eta Herri

torical rights or "fueros" of the two regions that predate the 1978 constitution but are recognised by it. The proposal could therefore be adopted by consensus within the existing constitutional framework. Interpretation of these rights goes to the root of the Basque conflict, the definition of sovereignty and the relationship between Spain's autonomous regions.

The idea is to create, in the first instance, an all-party working group of regional MPs that would study the matter over the next 12 months, in a process consciously borrowed from the Irish experience of all-party talks.

Crucial to the success of the initiative has been the support of Miguel Herrero de Mazon, a conservative lawyer of enormous prestige throughout Spain who was one of the five drafters of the 1978 Constitution. Don Miguel, as he is known even by Socialists not given to respecting ancient honours, at one point sought to succeed Manuel Fraga as leader of the Popular Party, but his austere, patrician style was considered insufficiently populist for a party seeking to reinvent itself in the democratic era, and he lost out to Jose Maria Aznar.

The initiative attempts to tidy up some Basque business that the constitution left unresolved, as the annex tacitly recognises. Unlike Galicia and

constitution, two-thirds of Basque voters abstained and 23.5 per cent voted "no" amid overwhelming approval from the rest of Spain. This provided Eta with the argument that Madrid continued, even under democracy, to spurn the region's popular will. Pro-Eta circles also point to the clause in the constitution that gives the armed forces the duty to defend Spain's territorial unity. They interpret this to mean that attempts at Basque self-determination will inevitably prompt tanks to roll.

The latest proposal is the brainchild of the Basque mediation group Elkarriz ("Mutual Dialogue"), a low-key outfit that has engaged in painstaking talks with every political and social current interested in resolving the Basque conflict.

"We know it is impossible to get everyone to sit down together, so we adopted the technique of circular mediation, talking one-to-one to each person then taking the message to the others, gradually refining points in common," an Elkarriz spokesman said this week.

"The problem was to keep the process going, quietly, discreetly, without burning it by clumsy handling. We interviewed some 200 people, politicians, legal experts, academics, trade unionists, a broad mix of people that built up into a comprehensive network of support."

Should the all-party working group of Basque and Navarran MPs start work early next year, the idea's sponsors believe that Eta would be under enormous pressure to suspend armed actions throughout the year, because its political ally, Herri Batasuna, would be a participant.

A key link that could keep the separatists outside is an understanding reached between the Basque trade union leader Jose Elorrieta and Rafael Diez, leader of the union linked to HB. "This is similar to what happened between John Hume and Gerry Adams: establishing bridges between sectors that are ideologically close but separated by violence," the Elkarriz spokesman said.

"What is on the table is a point of contact, like the Downing Street declaration, that can open the discussion and could produce a new relationship between the Basques and the Spanish crown."

Catalonia, who were represented on the constitutional drafting committee, no one spoke up specifically for the Basques. This created a fierce and lasting resentment, reflecting probably the most important defect in a document that has proved remarkably resilient in accommodating the transformations of the last 20 years.

In the referendum on the



Police clash in Pamplona with supporters of the pro-Eta Herri Batasuna party after Miguel Blanco's murder

Photograph: Desmond Boylan/Reuters

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Have you gone mad? Or is it just a fit of toy rage?

If trying to track down a Teletubby toy this Christmas drives you crazy, just spare a thought for the poor shop assistants, says Ann Treneman.

It was supposed to be a jolly television interview that Santa himself would be proud of. The idea was to get Gerry Masters of the British Association of Toy Retailers to stand in the middle of a store, hold up a few Teletubbies, and chat a bit about the spirit of giving this Christmas season. Sound simple? "The store was horrified! They said there would be a riot and that I would be mobbed by mums grabbing the toys!" says Mr Masters.

In the interest of safety and public order the interview had to be cancelled and, really, Mr Masters should have known better. For this is the year when toy rage – the uncontrollable desire of a parent to act like their two-year-old while in pursuit of a toy – has come into its own. Last year the object of desire was Buzz Lightyear, earlier this year it was virtual pets and now it's Teletubbies. And if you think this is a story driven by hype, then head into any toy store and watch the grown-ups. As they



say in children's books, it's not a pretty sight. "I've heard some people say that their child is dying and that they must get this toy and then it turns out that they are lying. The child isn't dying at all!" said one spokesperson. "It really is shameful, shameful behaviour."

People say that today's parents just do not know how to say no to the kids. They don't have time to play with their children so the toy has become all important. The parents say that television is to blame. As for the television, don't even try to talk

sense to Tinky Winky, Po, Laa Laa and Dipsy. But it does make sense that if you live in a rat race, eventually you start to act like a rat. "Last year the Buzz Lightyear craze got to the point where people were flying to Florida from New York and having it couriered to Britain," says Mr Masters.

"It's becoming a macho thing. You can dine out on the story for months. The Americans call them 'destination products' and that means that people make a trip to a store specifically for that product and

nothing else." So what does it look like from behind the till when a Destination Shopper bears down on you? There are tales of flying objects, tears and strong language. "One of our staff had a clock thrown at him," said Barry Eldridge of The Entertainer group. Malina Patel of Toys Toys in Swiss Cottage in North London says that men are the worst. "You should hear their language. I wonder what they are like as fathers if they'll speak to me like this."

Perhaps, I thought, they would be bet-

ter behaved outside the M25. At The Entertainer in Southampton, I found Stephen Shepherd, who seemed born to manage a toy shop. He is 25 and admits to having three virtual pets and one Teletubby. The latter are in such short supply that even he had to get his Laa Laa at Argos but then traded it, via the personal ads, for Po.

"This is it. This is what it is all about!" he says, pulling Po out of a plastic bag that stays inside his desk, inside his office. "I couldn't take it on to the shop floor." This is clearly true, as on the shop floor there

are several parents who admit to making careers out of buying their children the set for Christmas. None, it must be said, are swearing, shouting or kicking. But Stephen Shepherd has no illusions about the ugly scenes to come as the dolls continue to be rationed: "Some people shout. Some burst into tears. You get people who lose their rag and start to swear."

So far he has not seen any actual violence and Mr Shepherd wants to keep it that way. This year he has come up with a "toy rage" course for his staff and a flip chart with lots of facts to convince them that it is worth being empathetic to the customer who is accusing them of being a cheating little liar. "For every customer who complains, twenty six will not. Each customer that complains will tell between eight and sixteen people," he says. So if you resolve the problem, you save a lot more than one customer.

But how do you deal with a toy rager? Listening, empathy, information, he says. Never be false or condescending and never, ever start arguing. "Once you are in an argument," he says, "you will not get out and you won't make them happy."

He sees toy rage as part of the larger frustration of Christmas shopping. In shop after shop, people have to queue and wait to be served. Sometimes, they snap. "People will just accuse you of all sorts of things," he says. "If you say you haven't got the toy, they insist that you must have it somewhere. They immediately think you are trying to lie and hide something. But of course you are not, because we are here to sell."

But surely that is being naïve, Mr Shepherd. For you cannot sell what you do not have. The only place many Destination Shoppers will be going over the next month is frustration city. Mr Masters has had an idea for this: free stress balls for all customers, flak jackets and dart guns for all staff. It's the kind of joke you shouldn't make in a store full of toy ragers, though.

From one top cat to another: I could really do with a good spin vet. Any idea who handled Lassie?



Dear Socks, As the US's First Cat, you must get a lot of fan mail. But since reading your web page on

Tony's laptop, I feel I know you already. And frankly – I could use some advice. I guess you've had plenty of experience of political intrigue? Well, things have come to a pretty pass over on this side of the pond. I've been ousted! Overthrown! A clear case of "coup de chat". The end of an era, that's what it is – Downing Street devoid of its most influential resident in decades. It's a disgrace. I'd send you a *Daily Telegraph*, only it's not entirely savoury after several days in the litter tray. The lies they've been printing about

me – "flea-ridden and rancid" etc. When I got wind of plans to pension me off in some quiet backwater where I could snooze away my dotage and no one would mind my moulting or having the occasional little accident on the floor I assumed it was a peerage after years of loyal service. Little did I know...

Rumours of my death, I'm pleased to say, have been greatly exaggerated. I'm having to write this from a top secret location in South West London – though if those bastards think

they can keep me out of the public eye then they're wrong. It's a conspiracy, that's what it is. Started the day they moved in. That special little entrance Tony built into the back door was no cat flap. Turned out it was just so Robin Cook could come and go as he pleased. And when I went to curl up for a bit of a scratch, know what I found in place of my favourite armchair? A bloody mouse mat! And there was me thinking I had a permanent safe seat. Never thought I'd hear myself say this, but I really miss the

Majors. Old JM bringing me kippers back from Brighton.

Jealousy, that was the problem. I was the most popular Downing Street resident by a long chalk. Granted, I might have been involved in the odd scandal – but how many MPs can honestly say they've never been tempted to stray? Cherie was the brains behind the operation, of course. She's always made my fur stand on end. That glint in her eye when Rolf Harris did neuterings on *Animal Hospital*. And you should have seen the amount of British

beef she fed me. They were all in on it, you know. That old fox Mandelson. Sly, devious, vain, self-satisfied. OK, so there was a lot for a cat to admire in him...

I didn't take it lying down. I used to leave little dead creatures on the doorstep, but when Tony opened the door to find a couple of stiff oews laid out on the pavement, he just assumed they were friends of his from Oasis. Made no attempt to conceal it from me. "New Labour, New Kitten," I heard the PM say. Bold as brass, promising to "get rid of Fat

Cats". Not that I'm worried. The only way I'm having myself put down is when I'm interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on next week's special, feature-length, letting-the-cat-out-of-the-bag edition of *Newsnight*. Ah – sweet revenge. As you know, it's all a matter of PR. I'm already negotiating to get my life story published in time for Christmas. So – must dash... the paparazzi are waiting. Do write back (I could really use the number of a good spin vet. Any idea who handled Lassie?). Trust me – this country hasn't

heard the last of Old Humphrey. As Arnie said: I'll be back... Miao for now, Humphrey



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The Merry Widow

Photograph: Laurie Lewis

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Like *The Barber of Seville*, *The Merry Widow* is a first. Most operettas are about sex and money, but few as provocatively as Lehar's. The story takes place in embassy circles in turn of the century Paris. It discusses the affairs of

a romantic little principedom fit to rival Rudolf Rassendyl's Ruritania in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (book and operetta are near contemporaries). Its music is awash with gorgeous tunes - and wonderful dances - evoking middle-European folklore, written with the skill of a Richard Strauss or Puccini (more contemporaries). The very word 'operetta' means escapism - usually.

But what's best about the Widow is its realism. Its heroine has been married before for all the worst reasons - on the rebound from an unhappy affair, and for money. Its hero met the heroine before and rejected her for all the worst reasons - family pressure, and money - and then went off on a seriously naughty bender in Paris. He loves her, but can't bring himself to say it. Meanwhile, everyone else in sight is bending over backwards to be unfaithful. It's realistic, it's funny and it's sad. This perfect theatrical combination gave Lehar a monster hit in Vienna, Paris, London and New York.

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To qualify for the offer applicants must collect three differently numbered tokens. Tokens are published every day between November 22 and November 28. Only the tokens printed in The Independent and Independent on Sunday are valid. Flippies or any other reproductions will not be accepted. The offer is for 2 tickets for the price of 1 for each application. Each set of three tokens collected allows you to take advantage of the 2 for 1 offer. The free ticket may only have a value equal to or less than the purchased ticket. This offer is only valid for the three productions mentioned above. The Royal Opera House standard terms and conditions of purchase apply to this offer. The offer is subject to availability. No cash alternatives will be accepted. The promoters are The Independent and The Royal Opera House.

Think the unthinkable: think like a woman

From child care to pension plans, Labour's policies for women are a shambles, says Yvonne Roberts.

"Why can't a woman be more like a man?" Professor Higgins asks in *My Fair Lady*. The same petulant question appears to lurk behind each bungled attempt of the New Labour government to devise policies which deal with the female half of the population. Mr Blair and his boys just can't get it right. And they ought to be ashamed.

Some of it is simply a matter of presentation - but none the less insulting for that. The appointment of Harriet Harman as minister for women - but only as a hasty afterthought on the part of Blair. The choice of Joan Ruddock as her junior minister on condition that - a new feminist first - she accept the post without pay since the coffers were allegedly empty.

Much is far more serious. Yesterday, there came the news that the Government was considering abandoning independent taxation and returning to taxation for couples. On Wednesday, Gordon Brown revealed his hastily cobbled together £300m package on after-school clubs for a million children - an attempt to deflect the flak from the cut in lone parent benefits. Clumsily, Brown announced that: "A national childcare strategy... is now the policy of this country's government..."

Welcomed by many in the media, in truth, as measures go, it's the equivalent of a bumper sticker on a car that has yet to be assembled. And most of the female voters in this country know it. (What provision is there, for instance, for mothers who work shifts or at weekends or who are studying and can't afford even the most minimal of fees?). The proposal also shows an alarming level of casualness (or ignorance) about what actually constitutes a genuine national childcare strategy. And it reflects this Government's reluctance to accept that on a range of issues, now under review, among them childcare, a minimum wage, social exclusion, equal pay and pensions - the Government's present piecemeal approach won't work for women. If one policy is out of synch, then, like a necklace whose string is broken, it has a disastrous effect on the others. Take, for instance, the issue of the minimum wage, for which the proposed

legislation was published yesterday. The Low Pay Commission which has been hearing evidence is due to report in the spring of next year.

By the time any proposals come into force, the two year pledge to remain within Tory spending limits will no longer apply. Five million earn below £4.26 an hour, two thirds are women. A decent minimum wage - highly unlikely according to the pessimistic forecast of women's organisations and trade unionists - would enable lone parent mothers (whom, on average, earn £3.50 an hour) to avoid the trap now being laid by New Labour's welfare-to-work thrust.

This is the trap in which a woman escapes from poverty on benefits only to become an exhausted member of the working poor, made even more anxious because she knows that her offspring is subjected to substandard childcare provided by young and inexperienced under-25s who are themselves low paid and under-motivated. This combination results in high staff turnover and further disruption to children who deserve better.

Pensions are an even better illustration. The closing date for submissions to the Government's pension review was earlier this month. The Fawcett Society, the campaign organisation for women, has condemned the review as "a sham", claiming that the Government, in its obsession for all that is "New", has already decided to increase the use of private schemes - a disaster for many women.

The reasons why are explained succinctly by Jay Ginn and Sara Arber, pension experts at Surrey University. Poor childcare is part of the reason why a woman takes time out from her career. As a result, if she has two children, she receives, over her working lifetime, only 45 per cent of a childless woman's earnings. This, in turn, substantially reduces her pension. Non-employed housewives have it worse. "In enabling their husbands to participate in the labour market... (they) forego their own opportunity to earn wages and build state and private pension entitlements," the academics point out. Women form two-thirds of those over 65: only a third of whom have a private pension. Too many of the remainder, particularly those over 75, live in poverty.

Ginn and Arber argue that the assumption that public pensions are un-

affordable is erroneous. The move towards privatisation will exacerbate the "feminisation of poverty". In Denmark, by contrast, a reasonable basic pension is payable on the basis of 40 years residence, at the age of 67. Ginn and Arber argue for such a measure in Britain, set above the level of income support and index linked. In addition, they recommend that membership of a second tier employment-related state pension should be mandatory, with provision made for carers who take time out from work; an end to tax relief on private pensions and a public education campaign to counter the vast advertising budgets of the private pension companies.

"The drive to cut state pensions... benefit the private pensions and insurance sector rather than workers or pensioners," Ginn and Arber argue. "Where such reforms are adopted, the changes... bear hardest on women." Anna Coote, part-time adviser to the Government's women's unit and deputy director of the influential Institute of Public Policy Research, frequently talks about how the modern welfare state isn't just about tax and benefits. "It's about services, social values and goals." She refers to a New Dialogue with women which will (belatedly) be initiated next year by the setting up of women's juries to judge government policies.

"The future of the welfare state inextricably involves family life and gender roles," she insists. So why do so many of New Labour's thirtysomething and single, predominantly male advisers appear so prone to attacks of gender blindness? Do they really lack the imagination to visualise what life is like for the girls? Girls who are increasingly aware how easily a female high flyer can find herself relegated to the low paid, part-time ghetto of forgotten talent once she's opted to become a mother or left struggling as a single parent - partly because the system remains resiliently fashioned by and for men.

It's damning that a government which is so keen to "think the unthinkable" when it comes to the welfare state, isn't also capable of recognising that unless it tailors policies to the female experience as much as to the male's, it will only exacerbate the inequities and dependency it is pledged to eradicate.

John Lytle is away

20/LEADER & LETTERS

We voted for it, it's needed, so where is the minimum wage?



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The heavy weather and long grind are indicative of the Government's priorities. It is being made clear that the national minimum wage will not come into effect until the end of next year at the earliest. Margaret Beckett published the Bill yesterday, but it is an enabling measure, with the details – including the level and some of the scope of the minimum wage – to be set out in regulations later. The hits that matter will be decided after the Low Pay Commission reports next spring.

Not that we should be surprised by the delay. Labour never promised a timetable, and Tony Blair's defensive posture on the issue bears the scars of having defended the policy – and the level of £3.20 an hour – as employment spokesman at the 1992 election. But there is no need for it to take this long: there is a difference between consultation and procrastination.

The principle of a minimum wage is simple and it is right. The most powerful argument is not directly one of social justice,

but of practicality. It is wasteful and perverse for taxpayers to subsidise employers who undercut their rivals by paying lower and lower wages. Given that the state, for reasons both of the common interest and of social justice, supplements the wages of many of the lowest-paid through Family Credit, allowing a free-for-all at the bottom end of the labour market simply invites abuse.

The minimum wage should be central to the Chancellor's ambition to unify the tax and benefits system, mainly because it would simplify Family Credit and increase the likelihood that people on benefit would be better off in work. By coincidence, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment published a joint paper yesterday called "Employment Opportunity for All". It is all about how to move people from welfare to work and "make work pay", and of course it mentions the minimum wage, but it is hardly stitched into New Labour's banners and

held high. The minimum wage ought to be the starting point: it makes sense, it is the settled policy of the Government, it enjoys overwhelming public support and it forms the platform on which reform of the tax and benefit system should be built.

So, why should the Government not ask Professor George Bain, the chairman of the arm's-length Low Pay Commission, to come up with a figure by Christmas, knock off 5p an hour, and legislate in the New Year?

Well, there is one important issue of coverage to be settled, and that is the extent to which the minimum wage applies to young people. Here, the Government seems to have trod unnecessarily warily on the sensitivities of the trade unions. It was Peter Mandelson, the "minister for looking ahead" as he described himself, who looked ahead and by mistake shared what he saw with a fringe meeting at Labour's Brighton conference last month. "I think there will be a differential," he

said. "That is the right course of action."

This was deemed so inflammatory that the Prime Minister's press secretary sought to distract journalists' attention by retelling a tasteless line from Tony Banks's Tribune Rally speech about William Hague's likeness to a foetus, in order to say how much Mr Blair disapproved of it.

And, no, most of the unions did not like it much. They are suspicious of Mr Mandelson, and of any weakening of the minimum wage. Indeed, if the argument for a minimum wage is an argument from citizenship, then delaying the age of majority to 26 would seem a controversial and retrograde step. But that is not the argument, and the economic case for a lower rate for people up to the age of 25 is overwhelming. We only have to look to the catastrophically high levels of youth unemployment in France to understand that. Citizenship is all very well, but not worth much without the chance of a job. This is not a complicated or difficult case

to make. Young people should be protected by a lower rate, rather than exempted altogether.

All that remains is for the Government to persuade a minority of small businesses that it can "make water flow uphill", in the graphic phrase of the former Prime Minister's policy adviser, Sarah Hogg. Of course, there will be some shake-out. Some jobs will be lost. "Any damn fool knows that," as the Deputy Prime Minister once declared. But it is possible that the increased spending power of the low-paid will create jobs. And there is limited evidence from the United States that in some sectors reduced staff turnover and increased productivity leads to new jobs.

The case for a minimum wage is clear and strong. If the Government believes its propaganda about unscrupulous employers fleeing the Family Credit budget and driving to the wall high-minded rivals who are trying to compete on quality in world markets, then it should hurry up and act.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

Museum charges

Sir: You rightly stress that the contents of the national museums and galleries in the UK are the property of the public ("Don't end one of our few great Enlightenment legacies", 26 November). I would like to point out that a very considerable proportion of them, when not paid for out of taxpayers' money, was in the past donated or bequeathed or partly financed from private sources on the assumption that members of the public would enjoy free access to them.

The state has an obligation, which it has until very recently always respected, to provide adequate financing for these unequalled public educational assets. But owing to repeated cuts over recent years, trustees are now being compelled – often much against their wishes – to exploit their collections by holding the public to ransom for access to its own property.

In my view this is totally unacceptable as a matter of basic principle (and so going beyond any attempts to alleviate the impact of charging). Writing as a collector with something to offer, I am all in favour of genuine partnership between the private sector and the state for the benefit of the public. But if and when the state falls short of its evident duty I shall feel most sadly driven to reconsider my own possible involvement.

Sir DENIS MAHON
London SW1

Sir: Not all visitors to Britain and its museums are affluent tourists. In the last 12 months I have taken at least eight Czech friends, many of them future teachers of English, to London galleries and museums in which they encountered more of their compatriots. My visitors live in small towns and they were excited by the quality and range of the displays, which exceeded what they had seen even in Prague. None of them could have afforded one entrance ticket at the prices demanded by the charging museums.

TONY DAVIS
London E7

Sir: I have recently visited the Prado and the Baron Thyssen museum in Madrid, the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. They are well patronised; one usually has to queue to ob-

tain tickets and for those who cannot afford to pay there is, in France, one free day a week.

In affluent Britain, those who can pay should do so, native and tourist alike, but the one free day would make art available to all. Incidentally, there are concessions in European countries for EU citizens.

CLIVE CUNNINGHAM
Brenford, Middlesex

Deer hunters

Sir: The recent "bloody revenge" for the stag hunt ban on National Trust property (report, 25 November) clearly proves what the anti-hood sports lobby have claimed all along. That the culling of wild stag by gun is more efficient, more economic and more humane than hunting with dogs ever was. The venison sold as a result will be both nutritious and free from the toxins produced by a wild mammal when hunted to the point of exhaustion by bounds.

I look forward to Mike Foster's Bill against hunting with dogs receiving a fair reading today.

G LAWRENCE
London SW7

Sir: We are now seeing the ugly face of hunting. This is not control, this is not conservation, this is not about job preservation. This is cold, callous and orchestrated.

The Quantock Stag hounds have not lessened their hunting activities. They still hunt twice a week. Hunting countries have been loaned by the other West Country deerhunts. In fact they now have a larger area over which to hunt.

STEPHEN HONEY
Taunton, Somerset

from the responsible landowners, police, wardens etc, to discourage unnecessary shooting. Red deer thrive in many areas of the UK quite happily without hunting and the farming community in those areas doesn't see the need to resort to wholesale slaughter.

A TUFTER
Taunton, Somerset

No win, no fee

Sir: You report ("Irvine defiant over legal aid shake-up", 19 November) the determination of the Government, via the Lord Chancellor, to continue the wrecking of legal aid begun by the last government.

It is thoroughly cynical to pretend that solicitors will be able to offer a "no win, no fee" scheme for the majority of cases and that is particularly true of those who, for years, have operated the legal aid scheme on lower fees than are paid by privately paying clients and who have accepted lower incomes

accordingly. They have also voluntarily operated *pro bono* public litigation, in deserving cases. But you have to earn enough to enable you to work, at times, for nothing. This the Government seems to be intent upon making impossible, and the public will suffer.

STANLEY BEST
Winkleigh, Devon

Sir: Three points need to be made on the proposed adoption of conditional fees for lawyers ("Irvine defiant over legal aid shake-up", 19 November).

All conditional fee systems are bound to involve conflicts of interest. If, in a case worth £100,000, the advocate is offered £30,000 at the door of the court, his advice is bound to be tempered by his awareness that a bird in the hand is worth much more than the uncertainties of a trial. This sort of situation is painful to the advocate and unfair to the client.

Any firm of solicitors or set of chambers that operates too

conservative a policy will lose work: any firm or set of chambers that operates too liberal a policy will lose money. Every case that involves an assessment of a person's state of mind, and that includes every case involving an allegation of fraud or dishonesty, will now be too speculative to take on. It is almost axiomatic that any case with a prospect of success that can be assessed at over 60 per cent should be settled in any event. We should have a system which results in only the uncertain and problematic cases going to court. These are just the sort of cases that are going to be denied a hearing.

Conditional fees will work to the advantage of those who can spread the risk. A large firm of solicitors which has won its previous 30 conditional fee cases may be able to take a flyer on the next two or three. A small firm of solicitors or an individual barrister may be crippled by three, two or even one large failure. The Bar cannot survive with

the sword of bankruptcy hanging over the heads of perfectly competent practitioners. Pressure is bound to grow for some form of risk-sharing, for example pooling the uplift in fees so that it is distributed equally amongst members of chambers, to compensate individuals for lost fees.

ROBERT WILLER
Lincoln's Inn
London WC2

Mourning Hitler

Sir: JCB Gill writes "It should not be forgotten that when Belfast was blitzed Eamon de Valera authorised the Dublin Fire Brigade to be dispatched to assist in quenching the fires and helping the injured" (Letters, 22 November).

Is that the same Eamon de Valera who called at the German Embassy on 2 May 1945 to sign the condolence book for Adolf Hitler?

WILLIAM LONG
Loughton, Essex

Children in care

Sir: Young people have been let down by the state childcare system (report, 19 November), but we need to be clear as to what action needs to be taken.

The Government refuses to fund a third year of basic social work professional training, leaving UK social workers with an inferior qualification to those in many European and other countries. The social work profession still awaits a regulatory body independent of employers – anyone can call him/herself a "social worker". There is no process for de-registering a social worker. Unless sufficient and appropriate training and regulation are introduced, working with vulnerable children and young people will be relatively easy to achieve.

Rhetoric is not the answer – a quality, well-funded and resourced service is. More important is to put money into preventive services in local communities. Social workers all too often feel as if they are reacting to crises rather than being able to prevent them.

We are taking steps to improve the state care of children, but we will have to accept that abuse and ill-treatment will always occur, because of the deviousness of its perpetrators. We therefore need to look at how to improve care, to minimise the need for children to live away from home and to give a clear message to anyone who ill-treats a child that they will be dealt with in the most severe and uncompromising manner.

PHILIP J MEASURES
Secretary
Association of Professional Social Workers
Uttoxeter,
Staffordshire

Planet of doom

Sir: The appearance of Venus in the December sky ("Venus's rivers of molten chalk", 25 November) is indeed timely, coinciding with next week's Kyoto conference on global warming.

Venus experiences non-stop thunder, 3km visibility, sulphuric acid clouds and a temperature of 450C. As its atmosphere is mainly carbon dioxide (93 per cent), our planetary neighbour may offer a taste of things to come should delegates fail to grasp the global warming nettle.

DR S MARIC
Sheffield

No poetry or theology, but a very nice line in ready cash



MILES KINGDON

I hadn't seen Jack for years. In fact almost all I knew about him was that his name was Jack – I didn't even know he was called Jack Lane until I read his obituary the other day. He was always Jack to me, a gruff, friendly, elderly figure who was one of the men in charge of Gaston's bookshop, and as I read through his obituary (which was hardly about books at all), a slice of my Fleet Street life came back unannounced.

I never worked in Fleet Street in the sense of being a daily journalist, but 20 years ago the *Punch* offices were just 200 yards to the south of Fleet Street and Gaston's bookshop was about the same distance to the north up Chancery Lane. What was odd about Thomas J

Gaston's (have I remembered the name and the initials right?) was that it was the only bookshop I have ever encountered which was not open to the public. There was a notice in the window saying "Librarians and Suppliers Only". This was because Gaston's bought all the books they could from reviewers, who were the suppliers, and sold them to librarians, who were the librarians. If you did go in, you would find books, certainly, but what struck your eye first was piles of books marked Durham Library, Plaisance Library, Devises Library...

It was a classic meeting of supply and demand. Librarians wanted books at less than trade price. Reviewers were given books which they mostly didn't

want, once reviewed. So the reviewers sold the books to Gaston's at about half price and Gaston's sold them on at about two-thirds price, and everyone was happy, except perhaps the author and publisher.

I didn't review many books, but I was the literary editor of *Punch* which meant nothing more than that I commissioned the book reviews and therefore could lay my hands on more books than the average reviewer. Each week publishers would send us copies of new books and although we could only review a fraction of them, they kept sending them, and I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the books were very nice and useful or just decorative, we

might put them on the *Punch* bookshelves – in fact I remember finding a lovely first edition of the *Savoy Cocktail Book* from the late 1920s which still had a review slip inside saying "Please do not review this book before July 12 1929". Obviously Gaston's did not exist on July 12 1929, or the chaps in those days were too gentlemanly to take advantage, but in my day there was a great deal of stuff that simply cried out to be taken out and passed on to a good home, at a profit. First novels, political memoirs, ghosted sporting lives – all went on the little journey up to Fleet Street, across that famous (and lethal) thoroughfare and up Chancery Lane, where Jack or Frank would look up and say, "Oh, hello,

Miles – what have you got for us today?"

Then they would skim through the books and give me cash. There is nothing quite like being paid in cash. Occasionally I have been paid in cash for doing manual jobs, and once for an after dinner speech, but the magic autumn leaves that fell from Gaston's float were the best of all, and helped to save my life at the time, as *Punch* was a desperately mean employer.

Although this shifting of books felt slightly shady, it did involve a love of books as well. Jack knew what would sell and what would not sell ("No Poetry or Theology", was another notice that adorned the shop) and also knew what to read.

"Have you tried this? It's ac-

tually rather good," he would say, waving a new arrival at me, and very often I would buy it from him (also at half price) and be glad I had done so. Occasionally we would go out for a drink together, especially at Christmas time, and I remember once being accompanied by him and the travelling rep from Mitchell Beazley. (It was not just poverty-stricken reviewers and literary gents who went to Gaston's: the salesmen with left-over books on their hands went there too.) I asked the rep, curiously, what books he couldn't shift and he showed me among other things a colour book on vegetables (how to grow them as well as how to cook them) which I admired and which he gave me because it was Christ-

mas and which I have used more than any other cook book since then, I think.

But the thing I most remember about Jack, never mentioned in his obituary, was his collection of apostrophes. He delighted in spotting misused apostrophes. Things like "The Jones's cat" had him chortling with fury. Before I transacted my books, I usually had to hear his latest. "I spotted a wonderful one in the Old Kent Road the other day," he would say. "A double misuse! A café called 'Joos Eat's! They'd left the apostrophe out of Joos but they'd put one in Eat's! The cretins! It made my day."

I am sorry he is dead, but I am glad I spotted his obituary. That made my day too.

Spare the risk, and cocoon the child



SUZANNE
MOORE
OVER-PROTECTED
CHILDREN

In these punitive times what a breath of fresh air it is to hear someone use the words "children" and "freedom" in the same sentence. Jacqueline Lang, headmistress of an independent school, made a sensible little speech about how we over-protect our children and it has become front page news. That such common sense is deemed newsworthy is an indication of how far we are from absorbing it. We are so used to seeing the word children linked to words such as risk, abuse, curfew that to talk of childhood as a time of excitement and exploration and invigorating risk taking seems outrageous.

This may be because we have been so busy recreating modern childhood in the image of our own addled adulthood that we cannot see the damage we are doing. The grown-up complaints of lack of time, of feeling stressed-out, of perceiving the world as an increasingly dangerous place have all been passed on to our offspring. Whereas many people remember the long, slow idling of their own childhoods, the summer holidays that went on for ever and ever, now kids feel as harassed and rushed and anxious as the rest of us.

One of the basic problems always seems to me to be that some parents will not leave their children alone to amuse themselves. The idea of doing nothing is an anathema in our puritanical, work-obsessed culture. So despite the fact that "doing nothing" may be both creative and relaxing, good parenting has in some eyes become a frantic holiday which involves constantly stimulating the child. These poor creatures, with dark circles under their eyes, cannot flop in front of the TV when they get home from school but must learn to play an instrument, because that is what well-rounded individuals do.

Even babies are not immune to such nifty behaviour. Every toy must be educational, as though 'play' for 'play's sake' were somehow a waste of time; for we implicitly tell our children that what is more important in the balance between work and play is always work. Many toys are no longer what you give children, so that you can get on with whatever it is you want to do, but complicated objects often needing adult supervision to make sure they are played with correctly.

As children get older, we begin to worry even more if they appear to be doing nothing. Hanging out, hanging around, those endless hours of sitting on walls and eating chips in the street are now perceived as threats to the very fabric of society. Sure enough, there are some kids who will get into trouble if they are allowed out at all hours; but there are just as many who will not respond well to curfews. Mrs Lang's views are

significant, too, in that she talked of loosening the restrictions on children at a time when the state wants to introduce more and more. School inspectors tutting at Summerhill, proposals for banning the purchase of cigarettes to those under 18, alongside Jack Straw's proposals to overhaul the youth justice system, point in a further regulation of young people. Indeed, adolescents, though avid consumers of the myth of freedom and independence, find themselves more and more financially dependent on their parents. Teenagers, it seems to me, are really not going to get much out of this Government, which is big on their responsibilities but has little to say about their rights.

All of this is done, of course, in the name of caring about our children. The children ferried about in cars are often, once they get on the streets, quite a hazard. No one has taught them how to cross a road, as they have been too busy coaching them as to what to say to paedophiles. Yet while we all nod our heads in agreement that it is better for children to walk or use public transport, there is a degree of dishonesty here. If children went to local schools, then there would not be a question about walking to them. If community were really as valued as it is claimed, then we would want our children to live near their schoolmates. Yet when the children of our Prime Minister travel halfway across London, what hope is there that this is a realistic goal?

In making the world a dangerous place, we over-assess the risks to our children and so prevent them from learning how to assess the risks for themselves. The reason that so much drug education does not work is that its emphasis on danger and risk does not tally with young people's actual experiences of drug use. We also forget our own growing-up; we forget how sometimes we learnt right from wrong by doing wrong. We learnt about perverts from teasing them and then running away, we learnt about drugs by taking them and about sex by messing about and, if we were lucky, we learnt about pregnancy and disease and even death through someone else's misfortune and not our own.

Like any parent I would hope that my own kids do not do some of the things I did, though mostly I hope that they will not lie to me as much as I lied to my mother. Yet as my eldest daughter enters the wonderful world of the teenager, I am relieved to see that there is safety in numbers. When she and her friends take the tube to the West End to buy stationery and ice-cream and hang about giggling, this gang of girls has little to fear. They are confident. Why shouldn't I be? They feel that they are untouchable. I used to feel much the same at their age.

But the great thing of course is that once your child can go about by itself, you have more time too, and you can relax and see that there are probably no more risks than there ever were. What is more, you may have to admit that a life without risk is a kind of half-life. Another reason that Mrs Lang's speech was so refreshing was because to share her view, you need a kind of faith in children, a belief that they will be OK in the end.

Instead too many of us are afraid of what we have produced, scared of what our kids may turn into. Our fear of our own future circumscribes their present. Surely though the kids are all right and, as Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, "It is not a question of stopping the movement of life; it is a question of fulfilling it."



DAVID JOCE

Tony and Gordon: the continuing saga of a beautiful friendship



DONALD
MACINTYRE
POLITICAL
RELATIONSHIPS

Gordon Brown is on a roll. If you doubt for a second how formidable a politician the Chancellor is, consider how he managed this week to delight his party – by playing Santa to the pensioners – without even momentarily arresting the growth of his "Iron laddie" reputation in the markets. There was lavish personal praise for his "Green Budget" – especially in the daily diet of the Labour Party faithful, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian*. Amid all the fulsome coverage there was just a hint that Brown is a radical in a way that Tony Blair isn't – that it's at the Treasury rather than at Number 10 that the true Labour flame is really burning. And now what's this? A *Daily Telegraph* interview which while laying heavy emphasis on the Chancellor's dark, brooding good looks, his tentative marriage plans, his undoubted attractiveness to women, elicits some mildly contentious answers. No, he doesn't like the term (promoted by some in the Blair circle) "rebranding of Britain". And no, he isn't up for "all this touchy-feely stuff". What's that,

if not just what Tony Blair has been up to – for example in his post-Diana relations with the Royal Family? A difference of view between the two indisputably most powerful men in the Government?

This may sound like nitpicking Kremlinology gone mad. Nevertheless the question matters because this is by a long way the most important alliance in public life. History will show, surely, that this is in the big league of deeply influential political relationships, on a par with – say – Asquith-Lloyd George or Bevin-Arlene. So to understand what's going on, and to take the measure of the hitherances and antagonisms that undoubtedly surface from time to time among some of the acolytes of both men, it's necessary to understand it a little better.

The first point is the familiarity, born of daily, intensive contact since the 1980s. Brown and Blair came into government already knowing each other better than most politicians get to know each other through their whole career. They wrote each other's speeches. Blair's most famous slogan as Shadow Home Secretary "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" had been invented by Brown and unhesitatingly offered to his colleague. The push immediately after the 1992 election for Labour to shed its union-dominated and tax-and-spending past had been forged jointly, in endless discussions between the two men in one or other of their adjacent offices. And while Brown had of course desperately wanted to succeed John Smith, the fundamental ideas on which Blair campaigned for the leadership in 1994 had a shared copyright.

Given that background, you

need to distinguish between Brown's relations with Blair, and that between some of Brown's friends and some of Blair's. The two men see and telephone each other daily, sometimes as often as three times a day. This makes the relationship more mysterious and wide-ranging than any other in politics. But it also makes it closer. Brown and Blair know each other at least as well as they know most of their own entourages. The two men's press secretaries, Alistair Campbell and Charlie Whelan, show every sign of working together closely. But it would be understandable, for example, if some at Number 10 resented the fact that Blair took all the flak over the Bernie Ecclestone donation while Brown soaked up all the praise for this week's budget. Blair himself is utterly immune to this, believing simply that good publicity for Gordon Brown helps everyone in government, including him. Conversely those close to Brown have recently been going out of their way to emphasise the extent to which the Green Budget proposals – including the highly political handout to pensioners – were worked out in consort between Chancellor and Prime Minister.

This doesn't, of course, mean they are not different people. Or that there are not sharp and important disagreements. Blair rejected the 50 per cent top rate of tax proposed by Brown, and insisted on an EMU referendum pledge. Equally Blair took some persuading that a cut in MIRAS in last summer's budget was sensible. But this last is an instructive case. Apparently, Brown returned to the Treasury, having discussed the issue with Blair, feeling that the Prime Minister had had the last word. It was only when officials persuaded

the Chancellor to have another go that he reopened the issue with Number 10. In other words Brown behaved precisely like a loyal Chancellor with a recognition of Blair's role as the First Lord of the Treasury. It says a lot for Brown's towering position in the Government that this should seem almost counter-intuitive. It is easy to make myths: and one is that Brown has never, deep in his heart, accepted that he, and not Blair, became leader. Some of his opponents appear to think so. But that doesn't make it true. And those very disagreements occur in the ebb and flow of endless conversation between two politicians with shared values and experience. Margaret Thatcher once claimed that she didn't know Nigel Lawson was shadowing the Deutschmark until she read about it in the *Financial Times*. You can't, given the frequency of contact between the two men, ever imagine Blair being in a similar position. Civil servants quite often complain in private that Blair and Brown have too many meetings together in which officials are not present, or telephone calls in which there is not a civil servant listening on the line. They may have a point: one consequence is that decisions are not always easily understood by the officials who have to implement them. But it also means that disagreements don't so often become institutionalised as familiar set-piece territorial battles between Number 10 and the Treasury. As an origi-

nally distinctly untrusting Brown takes more officials – such as the monetary policy permanent secretary Sir Nigel Wicks and his own recent appointee Gus O'Donnell – into his confidence that may anyway start to change. But the one-to-one meetings aren't going to stop, however much some officials would prefer them to.

In the run-up to John Smith's death, there was a triangle of the three most active modernising politicians in the Labour Party: Gordon Brown, Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson. Since Blair became leader only one side of this triangular relationship has fractured, that between Brown and Mandelson.

Maybe the Brown-Blair relationship does defy gravity; didn't Lloyd George after all heakly say that there was no friendship at the top? But they would need each other even if they didn't like each other. Brown's strategic clarity and modernising drive have been crucial to Blair: Blair has reconnected the party with the electorate, and he remains what Britain voted for on 1 May. Brown is a restless, driven politician who certainly still wants to be prime minister. He may yet, in time, become so; perhaps precisely as Callaghan did when Wilson went in 1976. But he also knows that his success is intimately bound to Blair's. Nothing can be sure; the relationship could in time go sour. But it hasn't happened yet. And until it does, it still remains the most potent political axis of modern times.

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RUPERT
CORNWELL
ENLARGEMENT
OF THE EU

It has been pretty heady stuff. Our esteemed Foreign Secretary touring the ancient capitals of *MittelEuropa* this week, dismissing the 45 years of the continent's division during the Cold War as aberration, and proclaiming that Britain will be a leader in the great enterprise of reuniting Europe for ever. For that is the true meaning of the next phase of EU enlargement: restoring Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and the rest to their rightful places in the European fold. How right Robin Cook was too, to warn of the risk of replacing the Iron Curtain with a velvet curtain that would leave those countries not considered this time around feeling like second-class citizens. Equally correctly, he insists that all 11 original applicants (including even the peculiarly problematic Turkey) and not just the six probable first wave candidates – Cyprus, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Estonia and Slovenia – be invited to the Buckingham Palace conference in February where Britain, holder of the EU Presidency for the first half of 1998, will give a "flying start" to the enlargement marathon. That though will be the easy bit. The nitty-gritty negotiations to marry the rich economies of Western Europe with their formerly Communist and much poorer Eastern sisters

will be tough enough. At least as hard, however, will prove the task of reforming the Union as it currently exists. For the simple truth, which to his further credit Mr Cook also pointed out, is that before Europe takes new members aboard, it must first put its own house in order. Basically, the European Union is still run according to the rules laid down in the Treaty of Rome which set up the original European Economic Community in 1957. Since then the Six have become Nine, 10, 12 and now 15. Along the way, structures and policies have been periodically tinkered with. For 40 years, the engine has just about kept on the rails, albeit grinding ahead more slowly with each new carriage that has been hitched to it. But a Europe of 21, not to mention one of 26, will surely drive our wheezing 40-year-old model into overdue retirement. For an expanded Europe to function at all, changes will be required across the board – from the Common Agricultural Policy and the allocation of regional subsidies, and above all in the EU's institutions. And these changes, at least as much as the other great project of the hour, the single currency, will reveal just how supranational the future Europe will be.

Take the Brussels Commission, the EU's ideas factory, ex-

ecutive and mediator rolled into one. With 20 members, it is already too big now. Enlargement, implying at least six extra Commissioners, would render it even more unwieldy and incapable of decision-making. If it is to be streamlined to say 10, countries would have to drop their claim to at least one Commissioner apiece. The best solution would be a Commission president approved by all member governments, who then picks his own team – either without regard to nationality, or on a loose regional basis. Ditto the Council of Ministers, the ultimate seat of power in the EU, whose chair Britain assumes in January. Already the Presidency is a massive organisational burden for smaller countries, and the case for groups of countries sharing the task becomes steadily stronger. And Mr Cook's grandiloquent undertakings this week do not mask another problem. Britain will be running the show for only six months, and will not have another turn until 2004 or 2005. In the meantime other countries, some of them undoubtedly less keen on enlargement, will be in charge. What price then a long-forgotten "flying start" at Buckingham Palace?

Then there is the matter of the extension of majority vot-

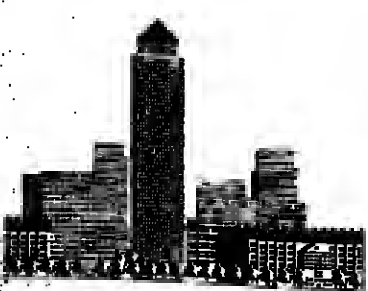
ing, something European leaders singularly failed to agree at their Amsterdam summit in June. The current right of veto to protect "vital national interests" already means progress is arduous enough. An unreformed Europe of 21 or 26 – even one day 30 or more – would resemble the UN without the Security Council. Something has to give, if the institution is to continue to function. The choice lies between some form of weighted majority voting that is binding or, more probably, a generalised right of "opt out" – in other words a multi-speed Europe in which the convoy need not move at the speed of the slowest ship, and where on particularly voyages, some ships need not leave harbour at all.

This is precisely what is happening with the single currency. However debatable the euro's economic merits, it is a vastly simpler project than enlargement. Why? For one thing, it will have at most 11 members to begin with, all committed to an agreed goal. Second, because they are united on the objective, they have found it easier to surrender sovereignty – not just to an independent central bank, but to one on whose board they are not even guaranteed a seat. The horsetrading beforehand (who will be president of the bank, its links with political authority) is fierce. But when the

deal is done, there will be no turning back.

All of which leads to the final and most important consequence. The changes mooted above are both essential, if an expanded Europe is to work properly, and momentous. Properly executed, they should be a step towards the "people's Europe" beloved of Messrs Cook and Blair, a Europe more accessible and comprehensible to the average citizen, doing things that have a tangible impact on his daily life. But perforce, this Europe will be more supranational. It must therefore be more accountable and democratic. The obvious, but controversial means of achieving this is to increase the powers of the European Parliament, the EU's one directly elected body, whose members are currently more celebrated for their alleged wizardry with expense accounts than for their legislative bite. But if not the European Parliament, then what?

Such are the preconditions of successful EU expansion. Ultimately of course the option remains of doing nothing, of giving the negotiations a rousing ceremonial send-off in London, and then quietly ensuring they go nowhere. But as Mr Cook's talking this week underlines, that would be worse than flunking the issue. It would be a betrayal.



OUTLOOK ON CHANGES AT UNITED UTILITIES, THE MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE AND THE BID FOR REDLAND

King Des lowers the divi and lifts the spirits

King Des is going. Long live the share rating. There are few more telling illustrations of the way things are changing at United Utilities than the decision to abandon its hopelessly optimistic dividend policy. The shares have underperformed the market almost from the day Sir Desmond Pitcher decided water and electricity did indeed mix. Before yesterday's announcement they were yielding a fat 6.7 per cent - way above the sector average.

The yield told the story. The City reluctantly swallowed Sir Des's multi-utility vision when North West Water soaked up Norweh two years ago. But no one really believed he could sustain year-on-year dividend increases of 11 per cent without draining the balance sheet to the point of collapse. Hence the loss of confidence and United's discount to the market. Throwing a chief executive overboard and adding gas and telecoms to the mix did not help sentiment either.

Now that Sir Des has a departure date and a successor in the shape of Sir Christopher Harding, it is safe to admit that the strategy is not quite everything it was cracked up to be.

Henceforth, the dividend will rise by a more prosaic 6 per cent in real terms in line with the returns that are actually capable of being delivered. For that the management deserves some credit and the market duly rewarded it yesterday, hoisting United's shares by 7 per cent.

But the lessons should not be lost. United Utilities always looked like a piece of

empire building gone mad. Once the cost savings had been wrong out of the business and passed on to shareholders, the multi-utility strategy was always going to struggle to find an encore.

There are plenty of scapegoats to hand for United's less-than-thrilling performance and a collection of them were put on parade yesterday - the windfall tax, beastly utility regulators and the failure of its overseas operations to generate decent profits.

Unfortunately these are all factors which should have been taken into account. United concentrated on how a combination of water and electricity would halve operating costs and conveniently ignored the fact that it was also doubling its regulatory risk.

Now that the chickens are coming home to roost, it will be someone else's problem. The new chief executive, Derek Green, intends to jump ship once the water and electricity regulators have completed their forthcoming price reviews. He calculates that the combined hit to the bottom line will be £100m which probably dashes any chance of a return to a progressive dividend policy. Sir Christopher will have fun finding a replacement chief executive when he arrives next April.

Setting rates is not an exact science

There's no pleasing all the people all the time. While carefully avoiding any pro-

of the possibility that the Monetary Policy Committee has been split over its decision to raise interest rates for a fifth time last month, Eddie George managed to demonstrate yesterday that setting rates is a matter of judgement over which reasonable people can and do disagree.

He was handed the opportunity when questioned by the Treasury Committee about the forecast for growth and inflation in Gordon Brown's Green Budget this week. The Chancellor is more optimistic than the Bank about growth next year but less optimistic about inflation and clearly feels there is enough momentum in the economy to encourage the Bank to hoist the cost of borrowing again in the new year. Mr George had no trouble agreeing forthrightly with this analysis.

The MPC's witnesses about whether the last rate rise was a move too far.

Did it not ignore the suffering of exporters under the burden of the strong pound? Had the Monetary Policy Committee not been split about the decision because some thought the economy had already slowed enough for inflation to be on target two years or so ahead?

It could not have been made clearer that setting interest rates is not an exact science.

As MPC member Willem Buiter put it, interest rates work on inflation "gradually and imprecisely" by making it more expensive for businesses and households to borrow, and by damping external demand through a stronger pound.

This is a useful lesson for the Bank to spell out. The new arrangements, whereby rates are set by an independent committee, will quite often lead to splits and disagreements - if they are doing their job properly.

If rates were far from where they needed to be, it would be easy for reasonable people to agree what to do. It is if they have got it almost right that they will disagree on the next move.

No doubt there will be much excitement when we get from minutes of the MPC meeting the first hard proof of a divergence of opinion. But remember: it is a sign the system is working well, not that it is failing. After all, Mr George and Gordon Brown certainly seem to differ.

French get a sense of déjà vu

If the French have any sense of irony, then Lafarge cannot fail to smile at the unexpected attempt by the UK competition authorities to wrest back from Brussels the responsibility for vetting one tiny detail of its Redland takeover.

Five years ago when Redland was stalking Steetley (the acquisition, incidentally, that began its downfall) the UK authorities intervened in a similar fashion.

In an attempt to fight off the aggressor, Steetley agreed to merge its building materials business with those of Tarmac. The UK authorities persuaded

Brussels that they were the relevant competition authority to examine the deal and promptly blocked it, allowing Redland-Steetley to sail through the Brussels competition authorities unopposed.

The Industry Minister John Battle has now decided that Lafarge-Redland merits the once over by the Office of Fair Trading because it will give the combined group a stranglehold over the ready mixed concrete markets in Leicester and Norwich.

These are what are known in the parlance of the anti-trust husters as distinct markets.

It is hard to see this being a showstopper, however. The local monopoly arises only because Lafarge acquired a small aggregates business, Ennemix, last year for £8m from under Redland's nose.

Presumably it would have no hesitation in disposing of the business to gain regulatory clearance.

Approval in Europe, however, could prove more complicated because the combined business would emerge with 18 per cent of the French aggregates market.

The French themselves are probably not bothered, even if it means hefty job losses in France. That means Brussels will probably not get too excited either.

But what a reversal of fortunes it would if Lafarge were given the green light in Britain but not in Europe. Admittedly, it looks unlikely turn of events but stranger things have happened at sea.

United Utilities to reduce dividends as part of programme to cut costs

United Utilities, the water and electricity supplier for the North-west, yesterday conceded it was not capable of delivering the financial returns to shareholders and customers that had been promised. As Michael Harrison reports, the decision to curb dividend increases and consumer rebates is a blow to Sir Desmond Pitcher, the outgoing chairman and architect of the ambitious multi-utility strategy.

The company has decided to reduce annual real dividend growth to 6 per cent compared with the 11 per cent that investors were promised when North West Water and Norweh merged two years ago. United

is also cutting the level of customer rebates under its "Progress with Responsibility" campaign.

The decision follows a five-month business review by the new chief executive, Derek Green, which will also see further cost-cutting and a more cautious approach to developing its unregulated activities.

United hopes the review will draw a line under a torrid two years of share price underperformance, and boardroom battle culminating in the ousting of Brian Staples, its former chief executive, in July. Mr Staples is suing the company and taking it to an industrial tribunal hearing, scheduled for the end of the year.

Mr Green said that the dividend increases remained at the higher level than the company's balance sheet would not have been able to cope.

The City reacted positively, marking United's shares up 52p to 777p, a 6 per cent increase, as analysts concluded that the group's dividend pol-

icy was now credible and sustainable.

Mr Green maintained that the multi-utility strategy, which also takes in gas and telecoms, remained "cohesive" but conceded: "Expectations were raised that outstripped the ability of the strategy to deliver."

Mr Green rebuffed suggestions that this was an indictment of Sir Desmond, who is known in the City as "King Des" and retires as chairman next March to be succeeded by Sir Christopher Harding, chairman of Legal & General. But he added: "We cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility and by that I mean the royal we."

United said the cost savings it had targeted at the time of the merger, £145m a year by 1999 and £474m in total, had been achieved through the programme of 1,500 job cuts. It has identified additional annual savings of £40m.

But Mr Green said its international and facilities management divisions had not delivered the profits at the

rate expected. It had also been knocked off course by the windfall tax, the electricity supply review and the prospect of a further savage attack on water and electricity charges when simultaneous price reviews take place in two years' time.

United estimates that the two forthcoming price reviews could knock £100m off its profits. Had the payout been kept at the higher level then dividend cover would have fallen below acceptable levels.

In line with the modified policy, the increase in the payout for the first half has been cut to 9.7 per cent, giving an interim dividend of 13.16p. Profits before tax for the period were up 4 per cent to £233.6m.

Although customers will still receive a rebate, it is being cut from £10 last year to £6.50 next year. Mr Green said that if shareholders were going to get lower dividends then customers had to share some of the pain.

Mr Green said the review had concluded it would be more difficult to deliver sub-



Sir Desmond Pitcher: will retire as chairman next March

stantial profit growth from its regulated water and electricity distribution businesses while the non-regulated businesses were not living up to expectations because of "lack of sufficient focus in the application of

the strategy". United was forced to take an £83m exceptional charge against a sewage contract in Bangkok and overall operating profits from the international division are just £1.9m.

Water companies boost dividends despite regulator's concerns

Two water companies, Yorkshire Water and Wessex Water, yesterday unveiled double-digit increases in dividends to shareholders, despite recent concern at bumper payouts by Ian Byatt, the industry regulator.

Yorkshire raised its half yearly dividend by 20.6 per cent to 6.15p, compared with a 5.8 per cent rise in profits in the six months to the end of September to £115.7m.

Brandon Gough, Yorkshire's chairman, said the increase was inflated by this year's share buy-back and the underlying dividend rise was a more modest 11 per cent, though he admitted this was at the top end of the company's own target.

"This is entirely justifiable. We've been under-distributing to shareholders historically and our dividend cover was too high."

He added that the main regulated water and sewerage business had raised its internal dividend to the quoted holding company by only 5.5 per cent.

Wessex hiked its dividend by 14 per cent to 6.5p, while re-

vealing a £3m fall in profits to £72.1m, at the bottom end of expectations.

Despite the payout, Wessex raised expectations of a big acquisition or further share buy-back.

"We have the firepower in our balance sheet," said Nicholas Hood, chairman. Shares in Wessex fell 2 per cent on the figures, dropping 11p to 495p.

Analysts were disappointed with a fall in profits at Wessex's non-regulated joint venture waste business, UK Waste.

Mr Hood blamed the decline on a plunge in prices for recycled waste.

He denied that hefty dividend rises increased the potential for big cuts in charges in the next five-year industry price formula from 2000.

Mr Byatt has pledged to deliver a substantial one-off price cut for customers. But Mr Hood said the new price formula should reflect Wessex's reputation as one of the most efficient water groups.

- Chris Godsmark

Surprise as British Energy appoints Hollins

British Energy, the privatised nuclear generator, surprised its shareholders yesterday by appointing a little-known former ICI manager as its new chief executive.

He is Peter Hollins (right), 50, who for the past five years has been a board director of the Brussels-based European Vinyls Corporation, a joint venture between ICI and Enichem. Mr Hollins will join British Energy in February and will be based in its Edinburgh office.

The appointment follows the abrupt departure of Robert Hawley, the previous chief executive, in July. Mr Hawley quit the post with a £450,000 payoff after being told he would not replace John Robb as chairman when he retired in 1999.

A British Energy spokeswoman said Mr Hollins had been picked for his "extensive business experience with major organisations and track record for strategic change." Between 1989 and 1992 he was general manager of ICI's resins business.

The company declined to reveal whether his salary would match the £225,000 paid to Mr Hawley.

Big shareholders in British Energy were surprised at the appointment. "He is pretty much unknown, but if he has the right pattern of skills and experience, then he should do the job well," said one institution.

British Energy shares fell 2p to 413p.

- Chris Godsmark



PowerGen faces £39m pension bill

PowerGen is facing a £39m bill from its company pension scheme in the latest twist to the long-running row over the use of pension fund surpluses in the privatised power industry. Chris Godsmark, Business Correspondent, reports on claims that PowerGen breached new rules which safeguard pension fund assets.

The setback for PowerGen follows the unsuccessful legal challenge earlier this year by National Grid and National Power pensioners, who claimed the companies had acted unlawfully when they used pension

fund surpluses to help fund redundancy payments after privatisation.

Though the judge ruled against the pensioners, he also questioned the way National Power had spread the extra pensions cost of its redundancy programme by paying money into its fund in installments.

National Power reduced the cost to the company by offsetting any outstanding cash due against huge surpluses in its pension fund identified by actuaries each year.

It has since emerged that a further 10 power companies, including PowerGen, also used installments to spread their redundancy costs.

This policy has been challenged by Coopers & Lybrand, auditors to the PowerGen scheme and the Electricity Supply Pension Scheme, the in-

dustry-wide umbrella fund created at privatisation.

The annual report of the PowerGen fund, which has just been published, says £39.1m of payments were outstanding at the end of March because of the way the company had spread the cost. The new advice by Coopers means the company could be forced to repay the cash as a lump sum, rather than offsetting the liability against any surplus discovered at the next valuation in April 1998.

The 11 companies affected by the auditors' ruling, including National Power and PowerGen, could have to pay a total of £115m into their pension funds. However, PowerGen has the highest deficit to make up.

Coopers said the latest legal advice argued that the company should have consulted the pension fund trustees before de-

ciding to pay in installments.

This new advice superceded previous legal opinions, which said the company did not need to tell the trustees. The auditors said the £39m deficit also breached 1996 rules on investments held by occupational pensions schemes, because it was being being classed as a loan from the pension fund to the company.

The scheme report said the fund's trustees were "initiating discussion with PowerGen as to how the situation is to be remedied".

Lawyers acting for the industry are due to give a final verdict on the auditor's opinion in the new few weeks.

Meanwhile the National Power and National Grid pensioners are preparing to appeal against the High Court judgement.

Chancellor wants even higher interest rates, Bank says

The Governor of the Bank of England admitted yesterday that the Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks interest rates have not risen far enough. He defended the Bank against accusations that it had not pushed rates higher as well as counter-charges that last month's rate rise was unnecessary. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, reports on the monetary policy balancing act.

Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, and other members of the Mon-

etary Policy Committee (MPC) faced a grilling from MPs yesterday over whether they had ignored exports and growth when setting interest rates.

Yet, quizzed over the Treasury's forecast for the inflation outlook over the next year, published in this week's Green Budget, Mr George highlighted the Chancellor's more pessimistic view. Asked whether he thought the forecast meant Gordon Brown foresaw further interest rate rises, he replied: "I think it clearly does."

The Governor also agreed that the new Government had inherited too loose an interest rate policy. "I think that was transparent in the advice we gave the new Chancellor," he said.

But members of the MPC refused to be

drawn on whether they would increase the cost of borrowing again if growth turned out to be higher than they expected. Much of the Treasury Committee's session on the Bank's recent Inflation Report focussed on whether the MPC had paid enough attention to the weakness of industry as a result of the strong pound.

Mr George defended the Bank's record. "Subject to the inflation target we have to take account of other objectives of government policy, one of which is not to screw down the export sector unnecessarily," he said.

He said the strength of sterling explained the tactical decision to move interest rates in steps of only a quarter point at a time, even though the MPC had thought that further increases would probably be necessary.

Boardroom pay increases at twice the inflation rate

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's call for pay restraint, made in his pre-Budget statement this week, has been given added weight by the publication of new figures today. A pay survey shows that Britain's company directors saw their salaries increase by more than twice the rate of inflation last year. Roger Tropp reports.

The annual study, UK Board Earnings, by Monks Partnership, the remuneration specialists, shows that directors' base salaries rose by 6.3 per cent over the year. Total earnings, including the last annual bonus, but excluding proceeds from long-term incentive plans, share options, pension costs and

other benefits in kind, were up by 8.6 per cent.

For chief executives, base salaries were broadly the same as last year, but total earnings rose by between 6.5 per cent for those in property companies and 7.9 per cent in financial organisations.

On Tuesday, Mr Brown appealed for pay restraint from business leaders and the rest of Britain on the grounds that it was "in no one's interest if today's pay rise threatens to become tomorrow's mortgage rise". He added: "It is moderation for a purpose. This means responsibility, not just on the shop floor but also from Britain's boardrooms outwards, where there must be moderation, not excess, and where an example should be set."

However, the Monks survey, based on annual reports in circulation last month, identifies 12 main board directors who earned a more than £1m each in the year. They include Hugh

Stevenson, Stephen Zimmerman and Carol Galley, the trio at the helm of Mercury Asset Management, who stand to share £40m through the takeover of the fund management company by the US banking group Merrill Lynch. Also on the list are Lord MacLaurin, the former chairman of Tesco, as well as the chairmen of Tomkins and TI Group and the chief executives of Smith-Kline Beecham, Hanson and Standard Chartered.

Though the number is above the seven identified last year, it is well below the 19 identified in 1995.

"This may be a consequence of lower bonus payments in 1996 and the move to awarding shares rather than cash to directors participating in long-term incentive plans," said Alison Smith, editor of the study. The Monks research also indicates that about 10 per cent of companies operate annual deferred bonus plans, under

which part or all of the bonus is paid in shares rather than cash, with the shares only passing to the director after a period of, say, three years. However, take-up of such plans increases with the size of the company, so that 30 per cent of FTSE 100 companies have deferred bonus plans.

Long-term incentive plans have also become more common as an alternative to traditional share options. Though the increase on last year was only slight, there were particularly big increases in take-up among industrial companies with turnover of between £1bn and £5bn and among the utilities, building and retail sectors.

Ms Smith said that the continued above-average base pay rises for company directors was possibly "a reflection of the shortage of individuals with the necessary skills to run the increasing number of companies with international involvement".

Royal Bank of Scotland shares soar after pre-tax profits rise 19 per cent

Year 2000 costs and losses on supermarket banking did not affect City reaction to the Royal Bank of Scotland's figures yesterday. Shares in the bank soared after it announced bumper annual profits. Lea Paterson reports.

Heavy start-up costs for the bank's new retail business, including a 50/50 joint venture with Tesco, failed to affect sentiment. Tesco Personal Finance, which began trading in July, lost £11m. But the bank defended the deficit, saying the link-up had been "embarrassingly successful".

Almost 400,000 customers, including 195,000 deposit hold-

ers and 140,000 holders of Tesco's ClubCard Plus loyalty card, have signed up to Tesco Personal Finance since launch. Early difficulties experienced by Tesco account holders were due to larger-than-anticipated volumes and were now largely resolved, the bank said.

In aggregate, the bank's new retail businesses, which include a stake in the Virgin One

bank account, knocked £27m from the bottom line last year. Mr Mathewson said that initial losses on these businesses were "almost inevitable, because of start-up and acquisition costs". The new retail businesses are expected to break even in 1999 and to start generating profit in 2000.

Following news of the figures, which beat most City expectations, shares in the bank rose sharply. Shares closed at 685p, 12p up on the day.

Direct Line, Royal Bank's insurance company, performed better than many analysts predicted. In a climate of cut-throat competition in the UK insurance market, Direct Line's pre-tax profits grew by 37 per cent to £36.2m. The bank said that Direct Line's "competitive strengths—its brand, cost control and economies of scale", contributed to the insurer's performance.

Around 16,000 bank employees stand to receive an annual bonus equal to 9.5 per cent of salary.

The final dividend will be 15.2p a share. With the interim dividend of 6.2p, this gives a total for the year of 21.4p.



George Mathewson: 'We are not in talks with Abbey'

Royal Bank of Scotland, which yesterday reported a strong performance across all principal businesses, took the opportunity to quash recent speculation that it could be taken over by rival bank Abbey National. George Mathewson, Royal Bank's chief executive, said: "We are not in discussions with Abbey. We do not feel under the threat of takeover at all."

Royal Bank said yesterday that, before exceptional items, pre-tax profits rose by 19 per cent to £768m in the year to September. After exceptional items, which included a £29m provision for the year 2000 and gains from the sale of a minority stake in Banesto, pre-tax profits were up 15 per cent to £801m.



Barclays Bank staff lobby Parliament

More than 100 employees of Barclays Bank yesterday conducted a mass lobby of Parliament in an effort to raise awareness of what has become the longest-running industrial dispute in banking history.

The unions representing Barclays employees, Unifi and Bifu, said 79 MPs had signed up to a House of Commons early day motion criticising the suitability of Martin Taylor, the bank's chief executive, to head up the Government's review of tax and benefits announced on Tuesday. Mr Taylor, who was paid £852,000 last year after a pay rise of 13 per cent, is believed to be in line for a place on the court of the Bank of England when four directors retire next February. He is known to have at least 350,000 options which, on current valuations, will be worth approximately £3m when they become exercisable next year.

More than 25,000 Barclays employees have been told their pensionable pay will be frozen unless they meet performance targets which will give them a 2.5 per cent bonus instead of a pay rise. The Christmas bonus of 2.5 per cent has been taken away. Clerks at the bank earn an average of £15,000.

Profits at Barclays bank are this year forecast to rise to £3bn from £2.35bn. Barclays staff focused their lobbying efforts on Nicholas Brown MP, the Government chief whip, George Howarth, a minister at the Home Office and Jane Kennedy, an assistant Government whip.

Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

Allied Colloids renews assault on hostile Hercules bid

Allied Colloids yesterday launched a fierce attack on Hercules, the US predator that is stalking the British chemicals group. Andrew Yates analyses Allied's plans to defend itself from Hercules' hostile £1.1bn bid.

David Farrar, Allied chief executive, said yesterday: "Hercules looks like it has run out of growth prospects. Its sales growth has been poor and its margins have been squeezed. They are short of ideas and they are after our new products."

His comments came as Allied spoke out against Hercules for the first time in what promises to be a long running and bitter bid battle. Mr Farrar also revealed that Allied was committed to reducing overheads and increasing margins over the next few years as part of its bid to repel the hostile bid.

Mr Farrar said he had to spend heavily on developing our distribution systems and offices around the world which will benefit us in the future. Going forward our aim is that overheads will only grow half as fast as sales.

Hercules fired back by accusing Allied of disregarding shareholders' interests. A spokesman for the group said: "They have a real cultural prob-

lem. Shareholder value doesn't seem to feature."

Hercules also slammed Allied promises to increase margins. The spokesman said: "Looking at its record you can see this is one of those jam tomorrow companies."

Allied yesterday hinted at other parts of its defence strategy. It plans to tell shareholders that it expects a strong profits uplift after the acquisition of CPS, the polymer business it bought a year ago. Allied also believes it will be able to continue to cut manufacturing costs as part of the attempt to increase margins.

"We are a high growth company working in high growth markets with a tremendous track record. Over the last two years we have put in a great deal of work to improve the performance of the company and we are just starting to see the benefits coming through," said Mr Farrar.

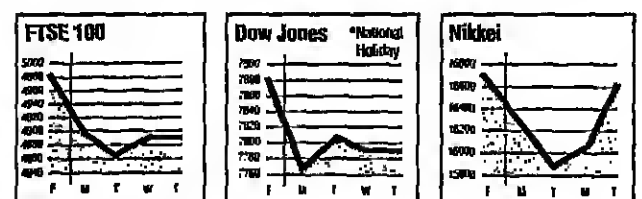
Allied is also considering returning money to shareholders via a share buy back or special dividend, although it has come to no firm decision as yet. "We are looking at all options," said Mr Farrar.

Hercules surprised Allied by launching a 155p takeover offer on Monday. The US group lambasted Allied for its recent poor share price performance, poor earnings per share record and the declining return on capital employed.

tax, an increase of 7.5 per cent on shareholders' funds. It compared with a 19 per cent return on the FTSE 100 index but exceeded the 1.3 per cent return on the FTSE SmallCap index. Income including dividends, interest and fees increased by 13 per cent to £71m.

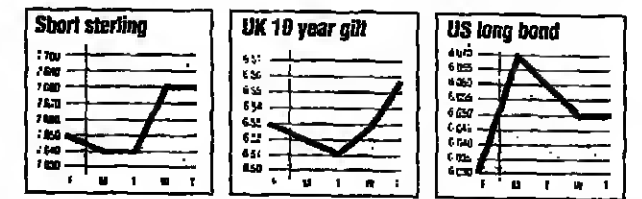
— Clifford German

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Change	Change(%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	4889.00	-2.20	-0.05	5367.30	3882.70	3.60
FTSE 250	4658.30	5.50	0.14	4963.80	4321.80	3.43
FTSE 350	2361.20	-0.20	-0.01	2570.50	1835.70	3.57
FTSE All Share	2308.97	0.07	0.00	2507.50	1942.22	3.55
FTSE SmallCap	2270.0	3.90	0.17	2407.40	2127.50	3.40
FTSE Realind	1237.9	0.30	0.02	1346.50	1198.70	3.41
FTSE AIM	987.7	-2.20	-0.22	1133.00	953.90	1.07
Dow Jones	7794.78	unch	unch	8299.03	6236.05	1.75
Nikkei	16803.20	557.65	3.48	21450.57	14996.13	0.93
Hang Seng	10553.10	-7.01	-0.07	16820.31	8776.88	4.00
Dax	3553.84	37.31	0.95	4459.89	2760.76	2.02

INTEREST RATES

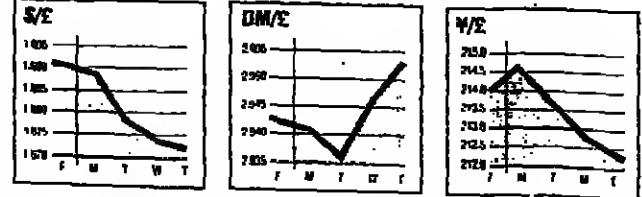


Money Market Rates	3 months	1 yr	1 yr disc	10 yr	1 yr disc	Long term	1 yr disc
UK	7.69	1.27	7.89	0.94	6.56	-0.83	6.43
US	5.88	0.38	6.00	0.31	5.85	-0.27	6.05
Japan	0.51	0.01	0.61	-0.02	1.99	-0.58	2.65
Germany	3.76	0.55	4.08	0.77	5.50	-0.26	6.06

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (p)	Chg (p)	% Chg	Falls	Price (p)	Chg (p)	% Chg
United Utilities	777.00	52.00	7.17	Hill Dickinson	157.00	-8.00	-4.85
Btl Bloch	117.50	7.50	6.82	Lombard	97.50	-4.00	-4.37
Johnson Matthey	553.00	30.50	5.84	Stagecoach Hld	767.50	-33.50	-4.18
Flaming Japan	144.50	6.25	4.32	Gen Cable	97.00	-4.00	-3.96

CURRENCIES



Pound	At 12pm	Change	At 12pm	Dollar	At 12pm	Change	At 12pm
Dollar	1.6724	-0.16c	1.6743	Sterling	0.5980	+0.006p	0.5972
D-Mark	2.9525	+0.33pf	2.5757	D-Mark	1.7657	+0.44pf	1.5286
Yen	212.30	+0.91	190.01	Yen	126.95	+0.42	113.40
E index	104.10	+0.20	93.20	E index	107.20	+0.50	97.30

OTHER INDICATORS

At 12pm	Close	Chg	At 12pm	Index	Chg	At 12pm	Real Jan
Brant Oil (\$)	18.56	-0.53	22.42	GDP	113.90	3.80	109.7
Gold (\$)	296.00	-1.15	373.35	RPI	159.90	3.7	163.81
Silver (\$)	5.27	-0.06	4.74	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

www.bloomberg.com

source: Bloomberg

THE INDEPENDENT

Win a Christmas Shopping Weekend to Calais with Copthorne Hotels and Le Shuttle

Make Christmas shopping less stressful this year by winning a luxury weekend break at the 3 star Copthorne Calais Hotel.

The Hotel is conveniently situated by the Channel Tunnel Terminal and Cite Europe shopping complex which offers a wide choice of 150 shops and boutiques, ideal to finalise your Christmas shopping.

The weekend break includes a two night stay in one of the luxury Connoisseur rooms, with breakfast, a meal for two in the hotel restaurant and a free bottle of champagne to celebrate.

You can also take full advantage of the Hotel's excellent health and leisure facilities.

To enter, simply dial the number below, and leave your answer to the following question,

Q: What is the star rating of the Copthorne Calais?

0930 563 564

All Independent readers are eligible for a special rate of £45 per person for an overnight break at the Copthorne Calais Hotel. Price includes one night bed & breakfast & return Le Shuttle ticket based on two in a car, valid until 23/12/97.

To book call Le Shuttle Holidays on 0990 353535 and quote "The Independent Promotion". Prices are based on two people sharing a room. A limited number of rooms are available.

Call cost 50p per minute at all times. Winner picked at random after 23rd November 1997. Usual Newspaper Publishing rules apply. Editor's decision is final.

M&G squashes speculation about bid from Halifax

M&G, the leading fund manager and life office, yesterday moved to halt a wave of speculation that Halifax was about to launch a bid for the group, which manages £18bn and sells one-sixth of all personal equity plans.

Michael McLintock, M&G's 36-year-old group chief executive, declined to comment on a rash of bid speculation which has dominated trading in its shares since Merrill Lynch announced a bid for Mercury Asset Management, a rival fund manager, nine days ago.

However, he squashed speculation that M&G was in talks with any company by pointing to the rules of the Takeover Panel. "The Takeover Panel requires you to make an announcement if there's an untoward movement in the share price. We haven't made an announcement. I leave you to draw your own conclusions," Mr McLintock said.

Shares in M&G have risen by more than 23 per cent since

19 November, when Merrill Lynch announced its friendly acquisition of MAM.

When the announcement was made, M&G's share price stood at £11.80, valuing the group at £883m. It is now valued at £1,070m.

City dealers yesterday appeared to cling to the belief that a bid is imminent, marking down the shares just 14p to £14.32. M&G has been battered by a negative reaction to the investment performance of its funds, which have underperformed the FTSE 100 index, sometimes by substantial margins. This has led to a big outflow of funds owned by retail investors.

Sales were down by one-quarter to £511m while the number of redeemed policies rose by one-third to £693m—a reversal of the situation last year. However, Mr McLintock has brought in new management and revamped the group's funds.

— Andrew Verity

3i looks for cheap AIM companies to add to its portfolio

AIM-listed companies could become a bargain basement opportunity for 3i, the publicly quoted investment group, according to its chief executive, Brian Larcombe. The investment trust specialises in unquoted companies and management buy-outs but retains a portfolio of shares in

companies which have subsequently become quoted, including 13 listed on the Alternative Investment Market, according to the last accounts.

Commenting on the fall in value of AIM, Mr Larcombe said some AIM companies may find it difficult to raise required finance. However, he

said 3i was more interested in companies that appeared to be sound long-term investments than those which appeared cheap at any given moment.

3i's investment portfolio underperformed the 100 share index over the six months to the end of September, generating a total return of £217.4m after

tax, an increase of 7.5 per cent on shareholders' funds. It compared with a 19 per cent return on the FTSE 100 index but exceeded the 1.3 per cent return on the FTSE SmallCap index. Income including dividends, interest and fees increased by 13 per cent to £71m.

— Clifford German

Coomoorties Cup field

The field for tomorrow's big race takes shape at last and backers of leading contenders for the Hennessy now seem sure to get a run for their money. Greg Wood reports

Concern that the quality of the field for Peter O'Sullivan's last commentary might not do justice to the occasion faded yesterday, when both Sunny Bay, the ante-post favourite, and last year's winner Coomoorties were confirmed as runners for the Hennessy Gold Cup at Newbury tomorrow.

Cool Dawn, a lively outsider following a smooth victory last weekend, is a doubtful runner, however. Charlie Brooks, Sunny Bay's trainer, walked the track and declared himself satisfied with the state of the ground, which will have been a considerable relief not just to the clerk of the course, but also to the punters who have backed the grey at odds as short as 5-2.

RESULTS

TAUNTON
1.25: 1. GUTTERIDGE (J Murphy) 2-1 fav, 2. Northern Dunes 8-2, 3. Wotton Avenel 9-1, 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 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Swanepoel the rookie scuba-diving 'nuggett with attitude'

Six months ago, the very thought of life without Joost van der Westhuizen was enough to send Springbok supporters in search of psychiatric counselling. Suddenly, Werner Swanepoel materialised to calm the nerves of a nation.

Werner who? Chris Hewett sheds some light on the unknown Bokke scrum-half, who replaces the irreplaceable at Twickenham tomorrow.

This will sound heretical enough to uneducated English ears, so it is easy to imagine the kerfuffle it is likely to cause down Pretoria way. Still, in for

a penny, in for a kruggerand. Joost van der Westhuizen does not – repeat, not – possess the longest, fastest, most accurate scrum-half's pass in South African rugby. You want proof? Ask the Springboks themselves, any of them. Well, with one obvious exception.

Actually, make that two exceptions. Van der Westhuizen, the brooding but undeniably brilliant Blue Bull of Bokke legend, is not the sort to give best to anyone, least of all an understudy with little or no reputation outside the boundaries of the green and gold republic. But then, you are equally unlikely to catch Werner Swanepoel spouting forth on the subject. He talks about everything else, does Swanepoel, but he gives this particular issue a wide berth.

"We all know about Joost's ability, which is phenomenal," says the 24-year-old scuba-

diving Free Starter. "At the start of the season, my aim was simply to secure my place on the Springbok bench. For me, that was enough to worry about. Now that I am in the side, people say to me: 'Ah, you must play like Joost, get your game up to Joost's level.' It's no use my sitting back and saying: 'I can't do that.' I will try to take the opportunity that I now have, but to follow Joost is to ask a great deal of myself."

The real story comes from the coaches, players, journalists and rank and file supporters attached to this formidable and, in the light of last summer's humiliating defeat by the Lions and the subsequent management upheavals, remarkably happy Springbok camp.

"He doesn't possess the absolute killer break that Van der Westhuizen offers, but he's not far short of Joost when he

goes for a gap and, yes, he has the better service," says Louis de Villiers, an acute observer of the South African scene.

By common consent, Swanepoel eased a splitting selection headache for the South African top table by performing with striking maturity in last week's 52-10 victory over the French in Paris.

Much to the chagrin of the Bokke hordes, particularly those from Northern Transvaal, Van der Westhuizen had been invalided out of the tour a week previously, so Swanepoel, capped as a replacement but never as first choice, was given his head. He began by fielding a loose French kick and sending Percy Montgomery away for a try inside 50 seconds and with his forwards shelling out quality possession against a dispirited band of self-destructing *Ticolores*, he revelled in the occasion.

"The difficult stuff was over by half-time because the pack had taken charge and were giving me the ball on a plate," says Swanepoel. "At the start, the atmosphere at the Parc des Princes was quite something and it really meant something to me to be out there for the anthems, but the crowd went still after a while. All I needed to do was stay focused on my tasks. My teammates made it easy for me."

Modestly, Swanepoel paints a self-portrait of a rookie who knows his place in the great Springbok scheme of things. "The coaches tell me to play it as I see it, but when you're positioned between your captain, Gary Teichmann, at No 8 and a great stand-off like Henry Honiball, you tend to let others call the shots," he insists.

But according to another fast-arriving Springbok high-flier, the Western Province

flanker Bobby Skinstad, young Werner is no shrinking violet. "He's a forward's nightmare," he says. "He just doesn't shut up. He's a nuggett with attitude." An Afrikaans version of Austin Healey, then? The mind boggles.

Swanepoel was born in Bloemfontein and educated at Grey College, the great sporting nursery that boasts Morne du Plessis and Kepler Wessels among its more distinguished old boys. He won caps at under-21 and under-23 before touring Britain and Ireland with a powerful South Africa A squad last year.

Come the late spring, he was on the Bokke bench and it was from there that he observed the miseries of the Lions series. Indeed, he won his first cap in the final Test, replacing van der Westhuizen as the clock ticked down on a "dead" match at Ellis Park.

A generally unsuccessful Tri-Nations cost Caryl du Plessis his job as coach but his successor, Nick Mallett, was quick to make his own investment in Swanepoel's future. "I've known Nick for a month and I've been deeply impressed by him as a rugby thinker," says the scrum-half. "We're getting along just fine."

"What we are doing on this trip is reasserting our own standards; South African rugby has a culture of winning and we need to rediscover that culture after the disappointments of the Lions tour and the Tri-Nations. Quite simply, it is important to win every Test we play, both to ourselves as players and to the nation as a whole."

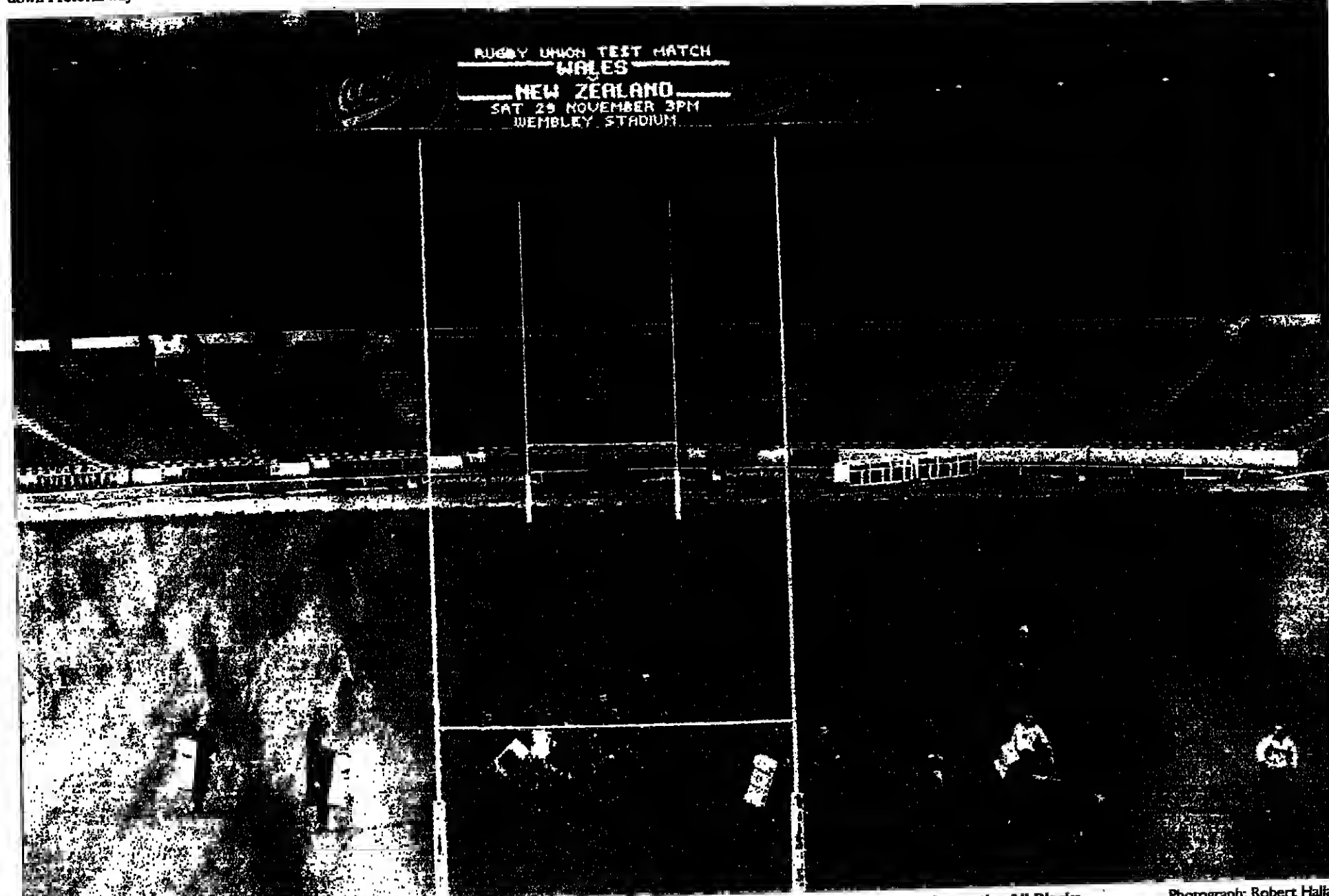
"I believe we are now playing with greater flexibility. You talk of Plan A and Plan B but we go up to Plan Z now; there is a different game plan for every



Swanepoel: 'To follow Joost is to ask a great deal'

game. And my own game? Well, it is for the English to discover what strengths I may have."

And off he goes, a happy-go-lucky smile etched across his dark, high-velvet features. "Tell me, will they be singing 'Chariots of Fire' at Twickenham?" he asks, blissfully unaware of his error. If it proves to be the only mistake Werner Swanepoel makes this weekend, England may need more than a few choruses of "Swing Low" to see them through.



Working out at Wembley: The Welsh team get acquainted with unfamiliar surroundings yesterday as they prepared to take on the All Blacks

Photograph: Robert Hallam

Robert Howley tackles New Zealand for the first time in his career tomorrow intent on reinforcing his standing as a world-class scrum-half.

The genial Welshman, cruelly denied a Lions Test berth against South Africa last summer by injury, knows he must produce a trademark performance if a 43-year losing streak against the All Blacks is to be ended.

Pressure on his broad shoulders is enormous, yet the Cardiff

Howley determined to be the best

player believes he has already done the hard part – being selected above his great friend and rival, Pontypridd's Paul John.

Kevin Bowring, the Welsh coach, gave John the No 9 jersey against Japan last week, but when Howley went on in the second half, he single-handedly transformed the side.

"I knew that I would need to

hit a certain standard if I wanted any chance of playing against New Zealand," Howley said.

"Paul and myself have been challenging for the scrum-half spot over several years, and that rivalry will continue. The more competition there is for your place, then the better player it makes you."

"I was pleased with my Test

comeback, but playing 20 minutes against Tonga will be nothing like opposing New Zealand. I will be pitting myself against the world's best scrum-half (Justin Marshall), while the team must compete with the All Blacks, producing awesome rugby."

Howley rebuffs any suggestion that Wales will resort to a tight set-piece game, the pop-

ular theory which many believe has credence, given how effectively the English Rugby Partnership XV took on New Zealand in midweek.

"It has been said that if you risk playing the high-tempo game against New Zealand, you will be blown apart," Howley said. "Wales are developing a game the players are comfortable with

– one played at considerable pace, so this is the acid test."

Wales will be in exile for the next 18 months, while work continues on the £120m Millennium Stadium, but Wembley has proved popular with their fans – tomorrow's attendance will be 78,000.

● Niall Hogan, the 26-year-old London Irish scrum-half, will deputise for the injured Brian O'Meara on Ireland's replacements' bench for Sunday's Test against Canada in Dublin.

SAILING

Dalton looks to atone for 19-day 'nightmare'

Grant Dalton, the skipper of Merit Cup, is promising to bounce back after posting a miserable seventh in the second leg of the Whitbread Round the World Race.

Stuart Alexander reports from Fremantle.

Second on the first leg from Southampton, everything went wrong just four hours after leaving Cape Town and Grant Dalton could only sit at the back of the fleet and seethe as the leg winner, Gunnar Krantz, brought Swedish Match into Fremantle

just one hour under four days ahead of him.

Dalton and his crew were in danger of running out of food as the voyage stretched to 19 days – the last 36 hours spent ensnared in a high pressure system.

The crew, who had endured "a nightmare", would be given a few days leave "to get their heads back together" and then it would be back to hard work. "We need to win one of the next two legs," Dalton said. "This is just the second race in a nine-race regatta."

Just to make sure there are no more mistakes, Dalton will be boosting his onboard meteorological expertise for the third leg to Sydney, even though he already has one of the world's fore-

most weathermen in Bob Rice. Lawrie Smith is doing the same on Silk Cat by bringing in the New Zealanders Nick White, the navigator on Yamaha when she won the last Whitbread race.

Still to arrive is the all-woman crew of EP Education. "I was going to stab myself through the heart with dividers if the girls had got past us," Dalton said.

WHITBREAD ROUND THE WORLD RACE (second leg, 4,600 miles, Cape Town to Fremantle): **Finalists:** Swedish Match (Swi) G Krantz 15 days 10h 45m; **Others:** 2 Innovation Keweenaw (Nor) P Kesteven 18:22:22; 3 Lorraine (US) P Standridge 19:05:27; 4 Silk Cat (GB) L Smith 19:30:08; 5 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 6 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 7 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 8 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 9 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 10 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 11 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 12 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 13 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 14 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 15 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 16 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 17 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 18 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 19 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 20 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 21 EP Education (Swi) P Kesteven 19:30:08; 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Atkinson in £4m move for Everton's Speed

Everton's unsettled captain, Gary Speed, is a £4m target for Ron Atkinson's Sheffield Wednesday. The Welsh international midfielder has been one of Everton's most consistent performers this season, but has grown disillusioned with the club's poor form.

Kendall rejected advances for Speed from Middlesbrough and Newcastle earlier in the season, but Wednesday have big money to spend. Atkinson, their new manager, reportedly has about £10m at his disposal.

Atkinson has paved the way for the Speed move by setting up a swap deal to send Mark Pembroke to Coventry in exchange for the veteran defender, David Burrows.

Atkinson took Burrows to Coventry in the first place and rates him highly. He is willing to sacrifice Pembroke in a straight exchange, with no money changing hands.

Everton's chairman, Peter Johnson, has hit out at his critics in the wake of Wednesday's 2-0 defeat at Chelsea, which left the Toffees at the bottom of the Premiership.

"Evertonians need to get behind the team and they also have to remember I don't want to lose every game," Johnson said after pointing out that £25m has been put into the club by the current shareholders. "We are all in this together. I don't want to travel down to London and watch my team lose, for God's sake."

Yesterday Johnson approved Everton's purchase of the Norwegian Under-21 goalkeeper, Thomas Myhre, for £800,000 from Viking Stavanger.

Southampton hope to complete the £200,000 signing of the Norwegian midfielder player, Bjorn Johansen, from Tromsø by the weekend. The 24-year-old impressed during a three-day trial last week.

Liverpool's hopes of giving a debut to Brad Friedel at Arsenal on Sunday are vanishing. The Anfield club are ready to pay the United States Soccer

Federation £2m for the US international goalkeeper, but so far have been unable to secure a work permit from the Department of Employment and Education.

Fulham have splashed out on two more players from Premiership clubs as Kevin Keegan and Ray Wilkins continue to transform the Second Division club. The midfielder Paul Trollope has completed a £600,000 move from Derby, while they have also spent £100,000 on Bolton's Scottish defender, Steve McAnespie.

Fulham have now spent almost £5m since the Harrods owner, Mohamed Al Fayed, took over the west London side in the summer.

Sheffield United are hoping to sign Tottenham's Scotland centre-back, Colin Calderwood, on loan as a replacement for Carl Tiler, who has been sold to Everton. Calderwood is also wanted by Aberdeen, while Spurs have denied reports linking them with Lazio's unsettled Italian international striker, Giuseppe Signori.

Bryan Hamilton, the former Northern Ireland manager, has joined Ipswich Town - where he spent the best years of his playing career - as first-team coach.

Scotland's top 10 clubs failed to gain permission yesterday to leave the Scottish Football League at the end of the season - but they still intend to press ahead with plans for a breakaway league next term. The Scottish League president, Doug Smith, used his casting vote at a management committee meeting to block the top clubs' proposal to resign.

Johan Cruyff, the former Barcelona coach, was in a stable condition in an Amsterdam hospital yesterday after being admitted with a heart complaint. He had double bypass heart surgery in 1991.

— Alan Nixon
and Rupert Metcalf
Toon Army trauma, Melbourne mania, page 31



Greg Norman fires out of a bunker on his way to an opening round of 68 at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday

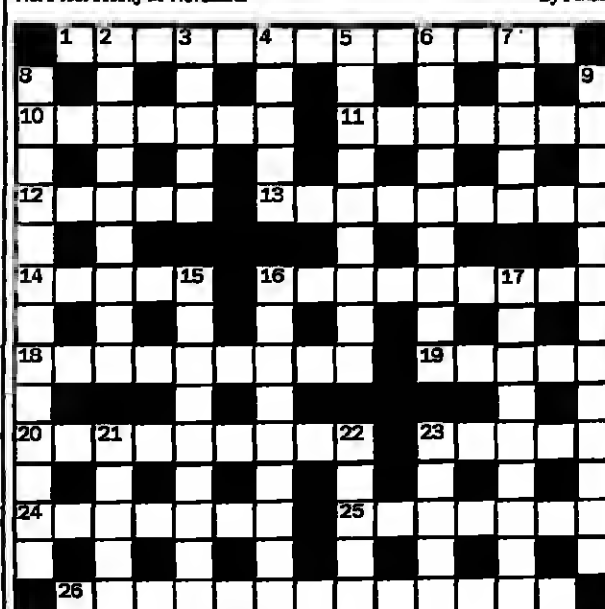
Scores, Sporting Digest, page 31; Photograph: AFP

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3468, Friday 28 November

By Mass

Thursday's solution



ACROSS
1 Long, diametrically opposed railings (8-5)
10 Muted Master yielding to paw, confounded (7)
11 Improve print and outer cracks on china (7)
12 Nick, trendy name (5)
13 White, like first of buds on flower (5)
14 German embracing Germany's measures (5)
16 Arrangement based on harmony (9)
18 Nothing in casting moves, looking back (9)
19 Spring on army man in convulsion (5)
20 It's not fair (9)
23 Just a little dash after time (5)
24 Africans giving party

DOWN
2 Not a Labour voter? (9)
3 Material ~~the~~ below river, it's said (5)
4 Country or state (not North American) (5)
5 Old soaring tune, say, magic sounds (9)
6 Do they absorb types of industry? (9)
7 Pursue with love, in short (5)
8 Coherent reprinted paper about English Women's Lib is out (13)
9 Cross quickly! (5-8)

15 Draw drink? Getting married, in a tizzy? (9)
16 Gross rage betrayed him? (9)
17 Measure with a country bouquet (9)
21 Some scab inside work-site building (5)
22 Draw out good interest (5)
23 Implicit finesse squeezing one (5)

Old Mother Woodward finds out cupboard is bare

It goes without saying that Clive Woodward would love to see his side beat the world champions from South Africa at Twickenham tomorrow. But, as Chris Hewett reports, the England coach is plotting a far more significant victory than anything he might achieve on the pitch.

Phil de Glanville, the former England captain, will miss tomorrow's demanding appointment with the rejuvenated keepers of the Springbok flame because of ankle trouble. Nick Greenstock, of Wasps, wins a fourth cap as his replacement and while De Glanville's defensive qualities will undoubtedly be missed, the introduction of one international centre for another is not, on the face of it, a cause for panic.

There are very good reasons for concern, though. If Clive Woodward, the England coach, is correct in his prognosis, it will not be long before the senior clubs' obsession with foreign players leaves the national management without adequate cover in several key positions. The day will dawn when the selectors go in search of a Greenstock and find only southern hemisphere thirty-somethings with dodgy hamstrings and six-figure bank balances.

Woodward spent much of last week in Old Mother Hubbard mode, bemoaning the worrying scarcity of provisions. Last night, he returned to the soapbox with a vengeance, lambasting the short-sightedness and self-interest he sees around him and accusing top English teams of shelling out pension plans to

imported has-beens rather than priceless top-level opportunities to youngsters with a legitimate future in the national set-up.

"The current structure of English rugby is laughable," he said in an interview broadcast on Sky's *Rugby Club* programme. "I don't think there is a country in the world in a worse position to generate a successful national side. I'm determined to be part of the team that fixes this. It's not part of my job description, but it's close to my heart."

He described Harlequins' decision to sign Zinzan Brooke, the great All Black No 8, as a "disaster", adding: "The headlines in New Zealand were 'Zimmy retires'. I've nothing against him - he's a top bloke and good luck to him - but we're just paying his pension. No one can come up to me and say the current structure is right for English rugby. The club scene needs a successful England team and England need a successful club scene. At the moment, we haven't got either."

Short-term success tomorrow depends on the ability of what amounts to a second new England line-up in three weeks finding immediate cohesion in the face of what is certain to be a challenge of extreme seriousness. Three-quarters of the way through a four-match series against the best the world has to offer, Woodward finds himself with a fresh left-wing, an untried midfield partnership, a pair of locks boasting five caps between them and an experimental concoction in the back row.

Thankfully, Lawrence Dallaglio does not appear the least bit perturbed by the comprehensive dismantling of the side that performed so honourably in defeat against New Zealand last weekend. "The aim is to set down our marker, not only to equal the southern hemisphere

teams but to surpass them," said the captain yesterday. "I think we have it in us both physically and psychologically to start the process with a win tomorrow."

"It's unfortunate that Phil, who has been on a roll this season, is unable to capitalise on that good form against the Boks. But I know from my experience with Wasps that Nick is a 'test-class player'."

However committed Dallaglio considers his squad to be, they will do well to match the battle-hardened sense of purpose evident among the South Africans. Cut to the quick by last summer's 2-1 reverse against the Lions and subsequent failures in the Tri-Nations series, they have reacted by rattling up 150 points and 21 tries in their last three Tests against Italy and France.

"We scored 52 points in Paris last Saturday, which I did not expect," said their new coach, Nick Mallett, yesterday. "But while we played particularly well, the French did not perform at all. More importantly, they lost heart totally. That is something the English simply will not do."

"With that in mind, it could be a case of grinding out the victory rather than winning in flamboyant fashion. The great thing about this group of players is that the inter-state rivalries back home have been forgotten. Everyone wants to do well for each other and hopefully we possess sufficient strength of character to see us through."

Simon Shaw, the Wasps lock, has recovered from an elbow injury and takes his place on the England bench at Twickenham. ● Newport have emerged as favourites to secure the services of the former England and Harlequins coach, Dick Best, as director of coaching.

Springboks' rookie with attitude, page 30

Published by Newspaper Publishing PLC, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 3DL, and printed at Mirror Colour Print, St Albans Road, Watford
Back issues available from Historic Newspapers, 01988 840370.
Friday 28 November 1997 Registered as a newspaper with the Post Office

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